



# SDG ACCOUNTABILITY HANDBOOK

A Practical Guide for Civil Society

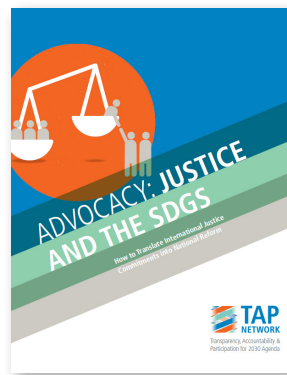
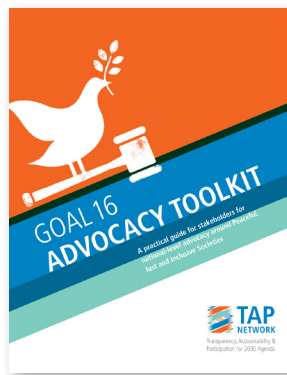


## About the TAP Network

The Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network is a broad network of civil society organisations (CSOs) that works to ensure that open, inclusive, accountable, effective governance and peaceful societies are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and that civil society are recognized and mobilized as indispensable partners in the design, implementation of and accountability for sustainable development policies, at all levels.

The TAP Network engages some of the foremost expert organizations on the issues around accountability for the 2030 Agenda, as well as Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): ‘to promote peaceful, inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.’ TAP benefits from the invaluable expertise, experiences and unique perspectives of its members, all of whom come together to collaborate under the TAP Network umbrella. This work is underpinned by recognition that we maximize reach and influence when many stakeholders speak with a unified voice.

## Check out other TAP resources



SDG16 Data Initiative

## Vision

TAP's vision for the 2030 Agenda is framed by notions of rule of law and the TAP principles of transparency, accountability and citizen participation, as well as respect for human rights. Effective governance and sustained peace in a post-2015 world require transparent, participatory and inclusive institutions that are accountable to the very people that the 2030 Agenda has committed to engage.

The TAP Network is united in the belief that open, inclusive, accountable and effective governance and peaceful societies are both outcomes and enablers of sustainable and equitable development. The 2030 Agenda must promote openness, accountability and effective public institutions, build trust between states and their citizens, lay the foundation for peaceful and just societies and empower civil society to engage in the design, implementation and accountability of public policies at all levels.

TAP's work also reflects the will and impetus of the millions of citizens from around the world who voted for ‘an honest and responsive government’ as one of their top priorities in the MY World survey—a theme echoed in consultations around the world throughout the 2030 Agenda negotiation process.

For more information on the TAP Network, visit our website at [www.tapnetwork2030.org](http://www.tapnetwork2030.org).

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*The drafting of this SDG Accountability Handbook has been supported by guidance from an Advisory Group of 8 experts from civil society – all of whom have worked extensively around issues of social accountability and the 2030 Agenda. The TAP Network is grateful for the contributions from this Advisory Group, including:*

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*Additionally, the TAP Network hosted a consultation workshop on 13 July 2018 around the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York. In addition to the Advisory Group Members that contributed to this workshop, the TAP Network would also like to express its gratitude for to the following experts, who facilitated various breakout groups on chapters of the SDG Accountability Handbook:*

- Nicolas Sautejeau, ONG Chile ACCION
- Paul Divakar, Asia Dalit Rights Forum
- Coco Lammers, Namati
- Birgitte Feiring, Danish Institute for Human Rights
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*Finally, the drafting of this Handbook was also supported by extensive consultations with Members and Partners of the TAP Network. We are also grateful for the inputs and insights from TAP's Membership, and all others who provided their insights throughout the drafting process in 2018.*

# Special Message from United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed

*The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the universally agreed plan to transform our world. With 17 Sustainable Development Goals as our guide, and a core promise to leave no one behind, the Agenda points the way toward a more peaceful, equitable and sustainable world for all.*

*Four years since its adoption by United Nations Member States, there has been important progress in bringing the Agenda to life. At the same time, we are not moving fast enough. The clock is ticking, we face immense challenges, and all partners must urgently accelerate implementation.*

*Accountability has a critical role to play in monitoring progress, highlighting gaps and preventing backsliding on commitments and ensure sufficient civic space in all countries and contexts.*

*In that spirit, I welcome the SDG Accountability Handbook prepared by the Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network. This resource, along with others like it, can help strengthen the capacity of civil society stakeholders to work with governments and other partners in achieving the SDGs.*

*I commend the invaluable forces of civil society for their leadership and dynamism across the 2030 Agenda. Together, we can advance our shared vision and build a world of peace, prosperity, dignity and opportunity for all.*



# Foreword

## TAP Network Steering Committee

On behalf of the TAP Network, we are excited to present this SDG Accountability Handbook.

The year 2015 was a momentous occasion - governments came together to commit to a shared ambition and framework for a vision towards 2030 with the adoption of 2030 Agenda and accompanying SDGs.

Since the adoption of the SDGs, the world is markedly different, as global trends around the protection of civic freedoms and increased frequency and impunity of human rights abuses and other atrocities against civil society have been less than encouraging.

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs must be seen as one of many opportunities to help fight back against these disturbing trends. Governments and other duty-bearers should be accountable for not only delivery of the basic goods and services outlined throughout the SDGs, but also effectively working to secure and preserve the fundamental human rights and dignity of all people, in all contexts. On this front, the SDGs' commitment to leaving no one behind, and reaching those furthest behind first, has the potential to become a defining moral imperative of our time. Governments must be accountable to this foundational principle of the 2030 Agenda, if any progress is to be made on any of the 17 SDGs, and towards all of them.

Civil society has an important role to play in helping to deliver and ensure government accountability for the SDGs. We hope that this Handbook will enable civil society to pursue accountability for the SDGs in an informed, efficient and effective manner that will, in turn, lead to greater accountability and positive action by governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Recognizing

that accountability is a shared endeavour, this Handbook builds on a wide range of resources, many of which have been produced by organizations of the TAP Network, and beyond.

Our aim for the Handbook is for it to serve as a practical resource for both civil society well acquainted with accountability processes for the 2030 Agenda, as well as those who are just beginning to consider how to drive government accountability for the SDGs. In addition to outlining broad approaches to support government accountability for the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the Handbook also includes practical tips to take into account when considering your own approaches. Finally, the Handbook includes case studies that showcase best practices and examples of approaches that can be replicated for SDG accountability in different contexts, which we hope will enable colleagues to learn from one another.

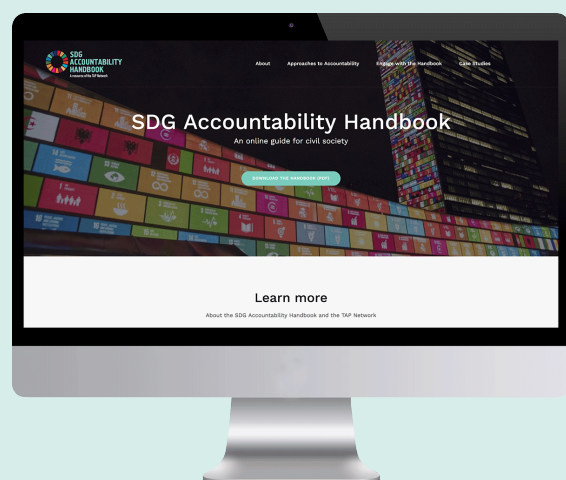
Despite the ambitious commitments made through the 2030 Agenda, and immense challenges that the international community will inevitably face to implement the SDGs at all levels, we are as confident that the SDGs have set a course that will enable us to deliver on the 2030 Agenda's promise to "transforming our world," and lay a strong foundation on which future generations can continue to build.

We hope that this Handbook will provide a foundation for civil society's ongoing work to drive government accountability for the SDGs and other related commitments. You can count on the TAP Network to collectively support efforts towards SDG accountability at all levels, and we hope you'll see this resource as a useful stepping stone for this important work between now and 2030.

# SDG Accountability Handbook

The SDG Accountability Handbook aims to serve as a practical resource for civil society—one that is continuously updated according to the present experiences of CSOs working on SDG implementation, monitoring, and accountability around the globe. To ensure the resource's ongoing relevance and usefulness, the TAP Network has created an online platform for the Handbook where civil society partners can access up-to-date content and actively engage with the TAP Network and other stakeholders working on accountability for the SDGs and 2030 Agenda.

Explore [www.SDGAccountability.org](http://www.SDGAccountability.org) today!



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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 2030 Agenda | Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development            |
| AAAA        | Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development                         |
| ABA         | American Bar Association   |
| CBO         | Community-Based Organization   |
| CEACR       | ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations |
| CSD         | Commission on Sustainable Development  |
| CSO         | Civil Society Organization   |
| ECOSOC      | Economic and Social Council  |
| GANHRI      | Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions                         |
| GN-NCSD     | Global Network of National Councils for Sustainable Development                |
| HLPF        | High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development                          |
| HRBAD       | Human Rights-Based Approach to Data  |
| HRC         | Human Rights Council   |
| IAEG-SDGs   | Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators                                |
| ICT         | Information and Communication Technology                                       |
| IDLO        | International Development and Law Organization                                 |
| MDGs        | Millennium Development Goals   |
| MP          | Member of Parliament   |
| NANHRI      | Network of African National Human Rights Institutions                          |
| NCSD        | National Council for Sustainable Development                                   |
| NGO         | Non-Governmental Organization  |
| NHRI        | National Human Rights Institution  |
| NSO         | National Statistical Office  |
| OHCHR       | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights                               |
| PPP         | Public Private Partnership   |
| SAI         | Supreme Audit Institution  |
| SDGs        | Sustainable Development Goals  |
| UN Women    | The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women     |
| UNDESA      | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs                       |
| UNDP        | United Nations Development Programme   |
| UNICEF      | United Nations Children's Fund   |
| UNISDR      | UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction  |
| UPR         | Universal Periodic Review  |
| VNR         | Voluntary National Review  |
| YDI         | Youth Development Index  |

## About the Handbook

### What is the purpose of the Handbook?

*SDG Accountability Handbook: A Practical Guide for Civil Society* seeks to support national-level civil society to help them hold their government accountable for commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda), including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It aims to help civil society organizations (CSOs) better understand specific approaches to hold governments accountable for the SDGs, and to guide them through the practical steps they can take to improve accountability for the 2030 Agenda in their country.

### Who is the Handbook for?

The Handbook is intended for use primarily by national or local level CSOs, although it may also be used by a range of other actors seeking to promote accountability for the 2030 Agenda. For the purposes of the Handbook, CSOs include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations or groups, faith-based organizations, trade unions and professional associations, and civil society coalitions, networks and social movements.

### What is the focus of the Handbook?

The Handbook focuses mainly on vertical accountability for the SDGs – i.e. the relationship between the State and its citizens – given that the primary responsibility to implement the 2030 Agenda rests with national governments. Approaches for the accountability of the private sector and civil society, as well as regional, international, thematic and other opportunities for SDG accountability are also highlighted in the Handbook.

The Handbook focuses on promoting effective CSO engagement with relevant actors, institutions, processes and mechanisms mainly at a national or local level, seeking to balance formal (i.e. well-established or government-led processes) with informal approaches to improve accountability for the SDGs. As there is no universal or one-size-fits-all approach to achieving SDG accountability for the 2030 Agenda, the Handbook seeks to provide general guidance to national and local CSOs that will need to be adapted to different national,

local and cultural contexts. As there are many existing resources on social accountability, this Handbook looks to complement those resources, contextualizing approaches for addressing accountability for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Recognizing the complexity around social accountability, the *SDG Accountability Handbook* is not an exhaustive approach to SDG accountability – rather it aims to highlight the main approaches that can be used by CSOs to hold their government accountable for 2030 Agenda commitments. The Handbook also does not fully address mutual accountability between States, nor should it be seen as a treatise or thesis on social accountability more broadly.

### How can I use the Handbook?

Each section or approach in the Handbook has been written in a way that allows it to stand independently from the rest of the Handbook. Cross-references to other sections, where applicable, have been provided. It is important to emphasize that the Handbook is not a stand-alone or static guide. Where possible, references to supplementary material and websites have been provided to ensure that users have access to the most current information. To this end, the SDG Accountability Handbook will feature regular revisions to both the print and online versions, and we would encourage colleagues to contribute inputs to feature in the Handbook on a rolling basis.

Finally, although the Handbook outlines approaches that can be pursued separately, approaches will often be more effective if utilized in combination with other approaches. Governments may not respond to only one type of approach or pressure, and multiple approaches often have a greater chance of success. Accordingly, achieving accountability for the 2030 Agenda will likely require using a number of different tactics and strategies to ensure that governments keep their promise to work tirelessly to implement the SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind. As national contexts and political environments vary tremendously, it will be important for users of this Handbook to determine which approaches to accountability would work best to hold their own national governments accountable.



# Introduction and Background

On 25 September 2015, following a broad and extensive consultation and negotiation process, the 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda). The 2030 Agenda, formally titled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” is a global 15-year plan of action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, while strengthening universal peace in larger freedom. The 2030 Agenda contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, and builds on its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition to its Goals and targets, the 2030 Agenda references

other explicit commitments, including a marquee pledge that no one will be left behind, and that Member States will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.<sup>1</sup>

Similar to the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda is a political declaration that is not legally binding for Member States. There are no defined consequences if countries fail to make serious efforts to meet the Goals or targets.<sup>2</sup> Despite its voluntary nature however, the 2030 Agenda carries a strong moral obligation or social contract on the part of governments to implement it. By making ambitious commitments to deliver on a wide range of sustainable development issues at the international



<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>2</sup> UN Women (2018). Turning promises into action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 35. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5653>

## Follow-up and review in key international agreements

In addition to the provisions on follow-up and review in the 2030 Agenda, there are a number of directly related international agreements that can help support accountability for sustainable development:

**The Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (AAAA)** establishes an annual Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up to support the follow-up and review of the AAAA and other financing for development outcomes as well as the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For more information, see: <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffdforum/>

**The Paris Agreement on Climate Change** establishes an “enhanced transparency framework for action and support,” an expert committee to facilitate implementation and promote compliance, and a global stocktaking of progress every five years. For more information, see: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>

**The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction** tasks the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) to support the implementation, follow-up and review of the framework through various actions including participating in the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). For more information, see: <https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>

**The New Urban Agenda** stresses that its follow-up and review must have effective linkages with the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda to ensure coordination and coherence in its implementation. For more information, see: <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>

level, governments are, in essence, declaring themselves accountable to the peoples to whom these commitments are made.<sup>3</sup>

### What does the 2030 Agenda say about accountability?

There are relatively few references to “accountability” in the 2030 Agenda, electing to use the language of “follow-up and review” instead. The 2030 Agenda does recognize “accountability to our citizens” in relation to the systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of the Agenda. The Agenda also outlines a number of guiding principles for follow-up and review that support accountability, including that follow-up and review processes at all levels will be “open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people” as well as “people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.” While the Agenda emphasizes the voluntary nature of fol-

low-up and review, it also encourages countries “to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels” drawing on contributions from “indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities.” While limited, these explicit commitments to accountability should serve as the foundation for civil society to hold governments accountable to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

### “Defining” SDG accountability

The concept of “accountability” – as it pertains to the relationship between individual governments and their citizens – implies the obligation of the State to account for its actions as well as the right of citizens to hold the State accountable. While the definition of accountability varies across disciplines, it tends to have three main elements in the context of development:

<sup>3</sup> UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA) (2015). Transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs: accountability for the post-2015 era. A background report by the CDP subgroup on Accountability. CDP Background Paper No. 25, ST/ESA/2015/CDP/25, p. 5. [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/cdp\\_background\\_papers/bp2015\\_25.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/cdp_background_papers/bp2015_25.pdf)

- i. *Responsibility* – the notion that authorities have clearly defined duties, performance standards or responsibilities to take certain actions;
- ii. *Answerability* – the obligation of authorities to provide information and reasoned justifications for their actions, especially to the people affected by them; and
- iii. *Enforceability* – the notion that authorities may be subject to formal consequences or sanctions for their actions or omissions.<sup>4</sup>

In applying these elements to the 2030 Agenda, there is a notion of shared responsibility for implementing the SDGs. However, the primary “responsibility” rests with national governments as the only official signatories to the agreement. With respect to “enforceability,” the Agenda lacks enforceability in a traditional sense since there are no formal sanctions or consequences if States fail to implement the SDGs – unless of course they overlap with existing national or international legal obligations.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, accountability for the 2030 Agenda tends to focus on the “answerability” element of accountability – namely that governments must be answerable to the people whose lives are affected by their actions and decisions.

Ensuring accountability for the SDGs may involve a variety of actions including “monitoring” – tracking inputs, outputs, short-term outcomes and long-term impacts – and “evaluation” – determining how or why SDG progress, or lack thereof, has occurred as well as assessing the degree of progress.<sup>6</sup> It is important to recognize that accountability for the 2030 Agenda is not only about ensuring that governments are answerable for outcomes to achieve the SDGs, but are also answerable for the strategies that are put in place to reach outcomes. Accordingly, it is essential to accountability that the processes, policies and institutions to implement and follow-up and review the 2030 Agenda are open, inclusive and transparent and respect human

rights.<sup>7</sup> While the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs outline a global plan of action, national governments will take vastly different approaches to implementation. Consequently, it will be necessary for civil society to hold governments accountable to the commitments they make through National Development Plans and other related laws and policies.

Given the voluntary nature of the 2030 Agenda, especially in relation to follow-up and review, it is important that people actively engage and participate in processes, where they exist, to hold their government accountable for SDG commitments in order to ensure overall accountability for the 2030 Agenda. As one expert notes, “the real politics of change is likely to occur at the domestic level”<sup>8</sup> and people – including vulnerable and marginalized groups – will have a critical role to play in ensuring that national governments keep their promise to fully implement the 2030 Agenda.

CSOs can promote people’s active involvement in generating accountability for the 2030 Agenda in a number of ways. As this Handbook demonstrates, CSOs can facilitate and support people-led accountability for the SDGs by ensuring that citizens have the opportunity to participate directly or indirectly in formal accountability processes or mechanisms. CSOs can also create informal opportunities for people to exert political pressure on their governments through a variety of citizen-led accountability initiatives. Importantly, the activities of CSOs that represent the interests of vulnerable and marginalized groups can help to give voice to people traditionally excluded from both formal and informal accountability processes.

### Prerequisites and Challenges to Accountability

There are a number of prerequisites that can support the pursuit for accountability for the 2030 Agenda as well as several challenges that may hinder progress.

4 Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2013). Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, p. 10. <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/WhoWillBeAccountable.pdf>

5 Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) and UN Women (2017). Seeking accountability for women’s rights through the Sustainable Development Goals, p. 5. [http://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/sdgs\\_accountability\\_womens\\_rights.pdf](http://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/sdgs_accountability_womens_rights.pdf)

6 International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and EVALSDGs (2016). Counting critically: SDG ‘follow-up and review’ needs interlinked indicators, monitoring and evaluation. <http://pubs.iiied.org/1736311ED>

7 UN Women (2018). Turning promises into action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 38. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?i=en&w=5653>

8 Dr. Beth Simmons cited in: Elgin-Cossart, M. and Chandran, R. (2016). Designing Better Accountability Mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Center for American Progress and United Nations University, p. 5. <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2125/EnsuringAccountability.pdf>

First and foremost, it is essential that fundamental rights and freedoms – including the freedom of expression, association and assembly and the right to information and political participation – are protected in law and practice. Recognized by major international human rights treaties, these rights and freedoms are vital to the functioning of an independent civil society and people’s meaningful participation in ensuring accountability for the SDGs. People must be able to participate in formal and informal accountability processes, express their concerns and question or challenge government without fear of repercussions. Without these rights and freedoms guaranteed, many people will be unable or unwilling to engage in SDG accountability processes.

The right to information is especially important for accountability for the 2030 Agenda. Public access to reliable, credible and user-friendly data and information is key to holding governments accountable. Information enables citizens and others to evaluate the performance of public officials and to monitor government actions. Citizens should have the right to access all public information relevant to the SDGs including through measures such as Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Governments should ensure that information is made available to all in a timely and accessible manner, free of charge, and without restrictions on its use and re-use.<sup>9</sup> In countries where FOIAs do not exist, civil society should demand passage of such laws to guarantee access to all public information, both related to the SDGs and beyond.

Other factors that contribute to an enabling environment to pursue accountability for the SDGs and may be considered prerequisites for people’s meaningful participation in holding national governments to account include: increased public awareness of the SDGs and government commitments; institutionalized consultation mechanisms at all levels; financial support; and the availability of materials on the SDGs in local languages and user-friendly formats.

While some governments around the world are creating a better enabling environment for citizen voice, transparency and accountability, others are restricting rights and freedoms that will invariably limit the ability of citi-

zens to pursue accountability for the SDGs. In many cases, civil society space is shrinking, with some governments reducing the scope, independence and sources of funding for CSOs through legal means or by threats, harassment or violence.<sup>10</sup> The decline in civic space for people to organize, participate, communicate and express their views freely poses a significant challenge and threat to ensuring accountability for the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the shrinking of civic space has seen disturbing trends since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. National and global efforts to push back against these threats must be strengthened – with the SDGs presenting another opportunity to demand these spaces, both around the UN and at the national and local levels.

The nature of political processes also produces specific challenges for SDG accountability. While all governments committed to implement the 2030 Agenda in 2015, government administrations will inevitably change, which can result in a decrease in ownership of the SDGs or a shift in priorities away from commitments made through the SDGs. In some cases, governments – new or old – may no longer consider the SDGs as relevant to their political agenda and thus rely on purely symbolic actions “to answer” for their implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Beyond that, there will always be internal political battles over mandates and funds, with bureaucratic officials seeking to protect or promote their agency’s interests – in terms of autonomy, budget or personnel – instead of carrying out wider policy commitments such as the SDGs that serve the greater public interest. All of these difficulties related to “politics as usual” will pose major challenges to ensuring that national governments keep their promise to implement the SDGs.

### **Ensuring SDG Accountability Processes “Leave No One Behind”**

The 2030 Agenda’s pledges to “leave no one behind” and to “reach the furthest behind first” should also be considered guiding principles in all formal and informal accountability processes. Both governments and CSOs alike should seek to engage a broad range of stakeholders including vulnerable and marginalized

<sup>9</sup> Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network (2015). People-Centred Post-2015 Review & Accountability with Transparency and Citizen Participation at its core. <http://www.tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TAP-Network-Review-Accountability-Position-Paper.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The Open Government Partnership (2014). Open Government Guide: All Topics, p. 61. [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/open-gov-guide\\_summary\\_all-topics.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/open-gov-guide_summary_all-topics.pdf)

groups that are traditionally excluded or unable to express their views in conventional ways in accountability processes. Such groups include people living in poverty, women, children and young people, older persons, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, forcibly displaced and stateless persons, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, among others. CSOs, in particular, should facilitate the participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups in SDG accountability by advocating for official government processes and mechanisms to take measures to ensure their inclusion, while also ensuring that civil society-led initiatives do the same.

“Leaving no one behind” in SDG accountability means creating an enabling environment and the conditions necessary for the meaningful participation of all people, including by addressing the physical, financial, linguistic, logistical, technological, age, gender or other barriers that may prevent certain groups from participating in accountability processes.<sup>11</sup> Although participatory accountability should be an ongoing, systematic and dynamic process<sup>12</sup> – rather than a one-size-fits-all or one-off process – CSOs should consider the following principles in advocating for or designing inclusive SDG accountability processes:

- Engagement should aim to be regular and continuous rather than a one-off opportunity;
- There should be formal and informal engagement mechanisms and spaces to support people’s effective, meaningful and safe participation and dialogue with decision-makers;
- There should be communication, awareness-raising and information-sharing with stakeholders to highlight opportunities for their contribution and participation;
- Steps should be taken to support people’s awareness of their rights, empowerment, intrinsic value

and capacity to participate in accountability processes;<sup>13</sup>

- There should be different ways for people to participate in accountability processes including online/offline, written/oral, and in-person/remote opportunities;
- Processes should take place at subnational and local levels, in addition to the national level, in order to facilitate people’s participation;
- People should have access to relevant information and materials in a timely and accessible manner, format and language they can understand;
- There should be targeted outreach and strategies for specific groups – for instance, through dedicated consultations, events, meetings, workshops or activities that allow a specific group to participate and express their views freely, and active measures should be taken to accommodate the special needs of groups such as providing childcare services for parents or ensuring that meetings occur after school for children and young people;<sup>14</sup> and
- Decision-makers and those in positions of power should be prepared to listen and provide feedback to people on how their input or participation has been taken into consideration.

11 Save the Children (2016). Save the Children submission for the report of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 8. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Children/2030/SaveTheChildren.pdf>

12 Participate (2017). Participatory Accountability for the SDGs: beyond Social Accountability, p. 2-3. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/ds2/stream/?#/documents/3519121/page/4>

13 The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2016). Human Rights in Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 25. [https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelseser/sdg/may\\_17\\_follow-up\\_and\\_review\\_sdg\\_docx.pdf](https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelseser/sdg/may_17_follow-up_and_review_sdg_docx.pdf); Participate (2017). p. 2.

14 German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (2015). Manual on Social Accountability for Civil Society Organizations and Municipalities in Palestine, p. 22.

## Case Study: Ensuring the Inclusion of Marginalized Groups in SDG Accountability Processes

**Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Netherlands and Nigeria:** A growing number of countries are dedicating a section of their VNR reports to the pledge of “leaving no one behind.” The 2017 report from Bangladesh includes a focus on persons with disabilities, and identifies specific actions taken under SDGs 1, 3 and 5 in relation to children with disabilities. Ethiopia’s 2017 report includes a sub-section focusing on children’s rights and welfare, and reports on policies and information systems that have been rolled out since the adoption of the SDGs. At the federal level, a database on children’s rights and welfare is being developed. Kenya reports on the rights-based approach of its 2010 Constitution, which aims to move Kenya towards a more equitable and inclusive future. The Kenya 2010 Constitution contains a comprehensive Bill of Rights, including rights to the highest attainable standard of health, to education, accessible and adequate housing, water and sanitation, as well as the right to food. These rights are all guaranteed as enforceable rights that extend to all individuals and specific groups, including children, youth and persons with disabilities.<sup>15</sup>

**Indigenous Peoples** - The Indigenous Navigator is an example of participatory data collection by a particular group of rights-holders. It provides a framework and a set of tools for Indigenous peoples to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of their rights. It is designed to monitor: essential aspects of the SDGs, including by collecting data for Indigenous peoples related to the global SDG indicators as well as complementary indicators to capture Indigenous peoples’ rights and aspirations (for example, for bilingual and culturally-appropriate education, land rights and self-governance); the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the outcomes of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.<sup>16</sup>

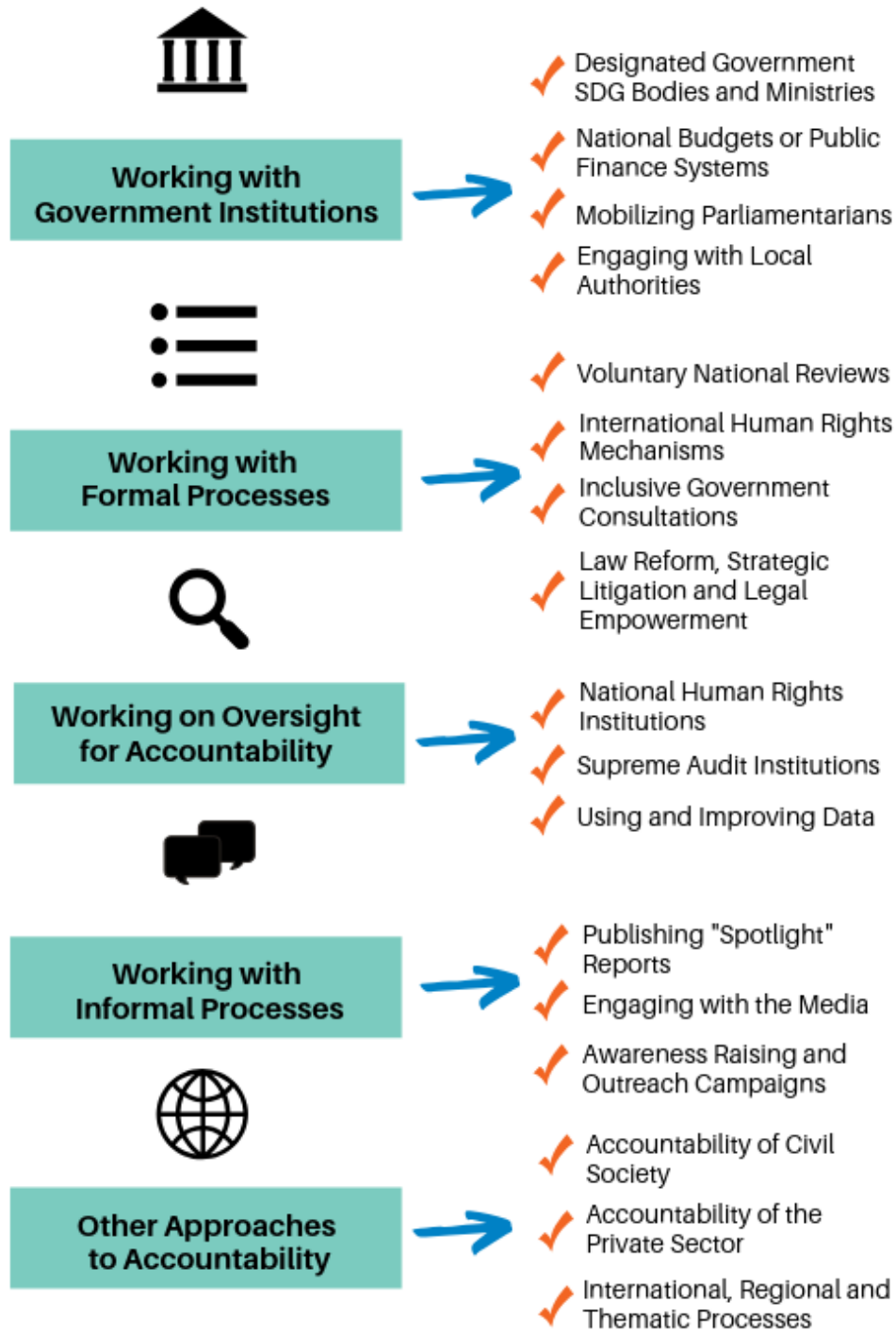
<sup>15</sup> Danish Institute of Human Rights, HR/2030, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> HRs and Data, p. 40-41

# Approaches to National-Level Accountability for the SDGs

*Each section or approach in the Handbook has been written in a way that allows it to stand independently from the rest of the Handbook. Cross-references to other sections, where applicable, have been provided. Each of these “Approaches to SDG Accountability” features insights into what the approach is, and why it’s important for SDG accountability. Each section also highlights practical suggestions for how to use this particular approach and showcases one or more case studies to provide examples of how these approaches have been used by other civil society actors around SDG-related topics in the past. Finally, recognizing that the SDG Accountability Handbook is just one of many resource guides related to social accountability, each section includes references to supplementary material and websites, to ensure that users have access to a robust set of additional resources to help guide their approaches.*

*It is important to emphasize that the Handbook is not a stand-alone or static guide. To this end, the SDG Accountability Handbook will feature regular revisions to both the print and online versions, and we would encourage colleagues to contribute inputs to feature in the Handbook on a rolling basis. For those interested in submitting content to feature in the SDG Accountability Handbook – including additional resources or case studies to showcase for each section/approach – we would encourage you to reach out to TAP at [secretariat@tapnetwork2030.org](mailto:secretariat@tapnetwork2030.org).*







# Working with Government Institutions



# Connecting with Designated Government SDG Bodies and Ministries

## What is it?

“Designated government SDG bodies” are the main government entities or coordinating mechanisms responsible for the implementation of the SDGs. They may take different forms ranging from Inter-Ministerial Committees to National Committees on the SDGs to High Level Commissions to Ministries of Sustainable Development. They may be new bodies, or existing councils or committees with an updated mandate to implement the SDGs. While they tend to differ in name, they all generally share a similar function – to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across government ministries, departments and organizations.

In terms of their composition, a representative from the executive branch of government – such as the Head of State or Government – may lead designated SDG bodies with members composed of ministers, government department heads and other sectoral focal points. In some cases, these bodies may provide for non-governmental stakeholder representation – including from civil society – or there may be other special technical committees for non-governmental representatives to support, guide or oversee national SDG implementation. According to one report, at least 18 countries volunteering for voluntary national reviews at the 2017 HLPF formally included non-state actors in governance arrangements.<sup>17</sup>

## National Councils for Sustainable Development

In addition to official government SDG bodies, National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs) exist in some countries to further sustainable development at the national level. NCSDs usually operate as an advisory body to government, examining sustainable development issues and offering expert advice on national sustainable development strategies and policies in public and private reports. NCSDs are often comprised of representatives from government, academia, the private sector and civil society and can offer advice of their own volition or at the request of the government or legislature.<sup>18</sup> The Global Network of National Councils for Sustainable Development and similar bodies (GN-NCSDs) currently lists the contact information for 54 NCSDs. See: <https://www.ncsds.org>

<sup>17</sup> The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) (2018). Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017, p. ii. <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ES-Eng.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit: A practical guide for stakeholders for national-level advocacy around Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, p. 22. [http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TAP\\_AdvocacyToolkit\\_1pgFINAL.pdf](http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TAP_AdvocacyToolkit_1pgFINAL.pdf)

## Why is it important?

Designated government SDG bodies can be critical to accountability for the 2030 Agenda given the central role they play in SDG implementation. They are responsible for coordinating the development of national SDG implementation plans and/or integrating SDG implementation into existing plans. They may also design and implement sustainable development policies and are often mandated to provide advice to the executive branch of government on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, they are responsible for ensuring that national SDG implementation plans include specific timeframes, clearly defined responsibilities for government actors and institutions, and transparent deliverables that are subject to regular reporting.<sup>19</sup> In some cases, these bodies may also serve as a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement.

These bodies thus represent a key opportunity to ensure accountability for the SDGs by defining who in government will be responsible for what and by when, and how information on actions, progress, gaps and challenges will be made available for public scrutiny and/or input.<sup>20</sup>

## How can it be used?

CSOs can take the following actions to engage with designated government SDG bodies in order to promote accountability for the SDGs:

**1. Identify designated SDG bodies and key decision-makers in government** – Before engaging with government actors, it is essential that CSOs identify the main coordinating body and/or individuals responsible for implementing the SDGs and at which level of government they operate. In some cases, there may be multiple bodies responsible for SDG implementation.

Where there does not appear to be a designated body, CSOs should demand clarity from the government as to which government agency, institution, ministry or individual is responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including by submitting an official infor-

mation request to determine who is responsible for SDG implementation and review.

**2. Determine whether designated SDG bodies provide formal or informal opportunities for non-state actor engagement in SDG implementation and/or review** – In some cases, there may be formal mechanisms or platforms established by government bodies to ensure the participation of non-state actors – including civil society – in SDG implementation and review. In other cases, there may only be informal opportunities or no opportunities at all.

Where formal mechanisms exist, CSOs should assess whether they are meaningful, inclusive and allow for the participation of marginalized or vulnerable groups. Where mechanisms are inadequate or non-existent, CSOs should advocate to government to establish or improve opportunities for non-state actor engagement in SDG implementation and review. CSOs may also wish to create an umbrella body or independent CSO forum that can act as a focal point for engagement with government.



**TIP:** Where designated SDG bodies exist, CSOs should assess the mandate, strategy and working methods of such bodies in order to identify opportunities for CSO engagement.



**TIP:** “Be pragmatic and precise: When approaching to government, present a clear initiative or plan, in order to assure the engagement and interest of authorities... Bring aggregated value to the discussion: Collaboration goes beyond CSOs telling governments what is missing. Civil society must propose solutions, initiatives, and innovative approaches.”<sup>21</sup>

**3. Engage designated government SDG bodies or government actors through:**

**a. Formal meetings** – Formal meetings offer a key opportunity for CSOs to share new or innovative ideas on SDG implementation and review with government bodies, and to provide concrete and practical recom-

<sup>19</sup> CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> UN Women (2018), p. 39.


<sup>21</sup> Philipp Schönrock, CEPEI, cited in: Together 2030 (2016). Experiences from national voices: Civil society engagement on national reviews of the 2030 Agenda, p. 18. [https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Case\\_Study\\_Compilation\\_FINAL\\_DRAFT\\_styles-1.pdf](https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Case_Study_Compilation_FINAL_DRAFT_styles-1.pdf)

mentations to government for action. Meetings may be held with individual members of designated bodies or they may be held as formal briefings or discussions with the entire body. Regardless of the form, CSOs should ensure that all meetings are structured effectively and offer clear and concise information and concrete recommendations to government bodies.

**b. Networking** – Networking directly with government officials on designated SDG bodies can help to build relationships and trust with key decision-makers and can open the door to informal opportunities for civil society to provide input and influence into SDG implementation and review. CSOs should seek to identify opportunities for networking with decision-makers and their staff at both formal and informal events. Once contact is established, CSOs should be proactive and seek to maintain regular communication.<sup>23</sup>

**c. Technical Support** – Some CSOs may be in a position to offer technical support, research and advice to government bodies in charge of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Technical support may include providing comparative data and information on what other countries are doing

to implement the SDGs, offering specialist training to government officials in relation to specific goals or targets, or seconding expert advisers to ministries or government departments. Technical support from CSOs may be particularly valuable in countries where resources to implement the SDGs are limited.

 **TIP:** Consider engaging with government officials in a constructive rather than adversarial manner. Constructive and positive engagement with government officials can help to build trust and relationships, allowing CSOs to maximize their influence when opportunities present themselves.<sup>24</sup> Further, emerging research suggests that accountability can be more effectively fostered when approached as a collective action problem, rather than an adversarial process where citizens are pitted against government agencies.<sup>25</sup>

**d. Facilitating Input** – CSOs that have a membership base or are part of a network can also assist designated government bodies by facilitating inputs from citizens in relation to consultations on SDG implementation and/or review. Civil society is often effective in working as an

## Structuring your meeting<sup>22</sup>

| Preparation                         | During the meeting   | After the meeting   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Know your key messages              | Be positive about certain aspects of the policy or legislation | Keep notes of the meeting – what happened, who was there, agreed actions                                  |
| Identify mutual interests           | Focus on one issue and stick to key messages                   | Follow-up on the meeting with a phone-call, letter or email   |
| Prepare information for your target | Offer solutions, not problems                                  | Provide additional information if promised  |
| Timing of the meeting               | Be truthful and credible – if you do not know, say so          | If suitable to the type of meeting, send a letter to restate your views                                   |
|                                     | Offer to provide more information                              | Finalize your official position on an issue before any vote on policy and related legislation takes place |
|                                     | Leave behind a briefing paper                                  | Stay involved   |
|                                     | Make suggestions about other people to talk to                 |   |

<sup>22</sup> Public Oversight, p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) (2008). Public Oversight of the Security Sector: A Handbook for Civil Society Organizations, p. 109. [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil\\_society/publications/2008\\_UNDP\\_CSO-Handbook-Public-Oversight-of-the-Security-Sector-2008.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil_society/publications/2008_UNDP_CSO-Handbook-Public-Oversight-of-the-Security-Sector-2008.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> CESR and OHCHR (2013), p. 15.

intermediary between government and the public to help explain complex technical information and to channel public inputs back into policy processes.<sup>26</sup>



**TIP:** CSOs should ensure they adhere to any deadlines for inputs to government bodies in order to impact their work and to build a reputation of being able to deliver results in a timely and effective manner.

## Key Resources:

- **High-Level Political Forum's website** provides a list of all countries that have participated in a Voluntary National Review (VNR) with many country reports outlining their governance arrangements for SDG implementation. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>
- **Progressing National SDG Implementation: An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017 (2018)**, by a group of CSOs, outlines the SDG governance and institutional arrangements of 42 countries presenting VNRs in 2017. See: <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ES-Eng.pdf>
- **Progressing National SDGs Implementation: An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018 (2019)**, by a group of CSOs, is the third edition in an annual series commissioned by civil society organizations. See: <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Full%20Report%20Eng.pdf>

## Case Study: Identifying National-Level Institutions Implementing the SDGs

**Kenya:** The Ministry of Devolution and Planning in Kenya is mandated to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The SDGs Coordinating Department has been established within the Ministry, supported by an Inter-Agency Technical Committee (IATC), comprising officers from key government ministries, CSOs and the private sector. For ownership and ease of follow-up, entry points for the private sector, CSOs, subnational governments, youth and persons with disabilities are typically their umbrella bodies, such as Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), SDG Kenya Forum, the Council of Governors (CoG), National Youth Council and the Association of Persons Living with Disabilities.<sup>27</sup>

**Germany:** The German Federal Chancellery is the lead agency for the national sustainable development strategy, with all government departments having primary responsibility for their own contributions to implement the 2030 Agenda in their respective policy fields. The institutional structure consists of: the State Secretaries for Sustainable Development, which steer the implementation of the sustainable development strategy, and which invite external experts from the private sector, the scientific and research community, civil society and the federal states and local authorities to attend its meetings; the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development, which raises policy-related sustainable development concerns in parliament; and the German Council for Sustainable Development, which is an advisory panel consisting of 15 individuals who represent the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, pp. 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Handbook for VNRs, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> The VNR of Germany, 2016 Handbook for VNRs, p. 27

# Utilizing National Budgets or National Public Finance Systems

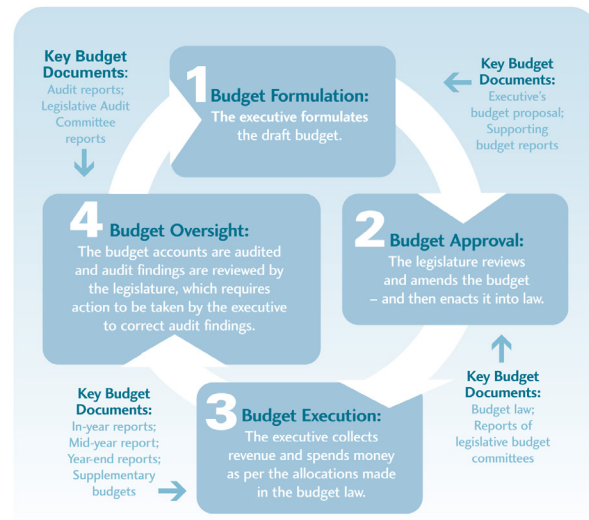
## What is it?

Government budgets are at the core of sustainable development. The budget is the government's most powerful economic tool to meet the needs of its people, especially those of poor and marginalized communities. Whichever SDG you may be interested in, the most well-intentioned public policy has little impact on that goal until it is matched with sufficient public resources to ensure its effective implementation.

The government budget is a financial statement presenting the government's proposed revenues and spending for a specific period of time, usually a year, which is often passed by the legislature, approved by the head of government, and presented by the finance minister to the nation. In most countries the budget process occurs in four stages, as shown below, and the various actors play different roles in each stage. While CSOs can have a big impact on budget decisions, implementation and outcomes, this impact is much greater when they work with other actors in the "accountability ecosystem" at different stages of the budget process (i.e. legislators, auditors, citizens, donors and the media).

## Why is it important?

The decisions made in government budgets, and how those decisions are implemented on the ground, have a direct and transformative impact on people's lives. Evidence shows that the best way to manage public



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funds efficiently and equitably is through budget systems that are transparent, inclusive, and monitored through strong, independent oversight institutions. On the other hand, lack of fiscal transparency and limited public participation and oversight undermine fiscal discipline, increase borrowing costs, undermine the efficiency of public services and create opportunities for corruption and other leakages.

When people have access to budget information, coupled with the skills and opportunities to participate in the budget process, the resulting engagement between government and citizens can lead to substantive improvements in governance and service delivery. As research shows, budget transparency, expenditure

monitoring and accountability can contribute to increases in spending towards, and better results related to, development goals.

The 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development (FfD) call for governments to report on their spending and progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda specifically commits to building “effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels,” and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda pledges to “increase transparency and equal participation in the budgeting process.” SDG indicator 16.6.1 focuses on the degree to which governments implement their budgets as planned, which is important for understanding whether governments are keeping their promises and delivering as planned on goods and services for citizens.

The 2017 session of the UN Economic and Social Council’s Forum on FfD Follow-up further recognized “the importance of better disaggregation of budget and expenditure data at the national and subnational levels, including by sex, to improve tracking of spending related to the Sustainable Development Goals and efforts to improve gender equality, accountability and transparency.” Finally, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development emphasized that ‘stronger implementation of transparency and public participation in the budgeting process can improve the effectiveness of public finance’ (2017).

This is a critical time for civil society to engage in the budget process to further encourage governments to improve their planning, spending and reporting to meet the SDGs. How countries manage funds to deliver on the 2030 Agenda can have a transformative impact on people’s lives.

## How can it be used?

CSOs play an important role in public budgeting. They can help improve budget policies by providing information on public needs and priorities through their connections with citizens and communities. Along with legislators, auditors, the media and the broader public, CSOs can also play an important role in holding the

executive accountable for how it uses public resources.

When CSOs can combine in-depth knowledge of a policy issue such as health or education with solid knowledge of budgets and an effective advocacy strategy, they can positively influence policy decisions. Strengthening civil society’s ability to analyse budgets and participate effectively can play an integral role not only in policies and service delivery but also in constructing a more open and participatory democratic society.

CSOs can advocate for greater transparency and participation throughout the budget process and use available budget information to engage in the budget process and advocate for change. They can use the Open Budget Survey to assess budget transparency, participation and oversight, and advocate for the budget documents or information needed to track the SDGs.

There are opportunities for engagement in each phase of the budget process:

### 1. Budget formulation stage – CSOs can:

- Analyse pre-budget reports and publicize recommendations to try to influence the budget before final decisions have been made. Where CSOs do not have access to pre-budget statements or reports, they can draw on evidence generated from analyses of previous budgets to advocate for budget proposals.
- Gather information on the public’s needs and priorities for what should be in the budget and use this information, along with their own budget analysis and monitoring, to communicate these priorities to the executive. CSOs can draw on formal and informal communication channels to engage with executive officials.<sup>30</sup>
- Try to influence what goes into the Executive’s Budget Proposal (the government’s major statement on fiscal issues for the coming budget year) in various ways. This includes engaging with or in advisory committees and participating in public hearings or consultations.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> International Budget Partnership (2017). Making the Most of the Budget Cycle: The Budget Formulation Stage. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/2017/02/making-budget-cycle-budget-formulation-stage/>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*

## 2. Budget approval stage

- As this process culminates in the enactment of the final budget law, when media attention is often at its greatest, CSOs can advocate for their issues. By providing independent analyses of the Executive's Budget Proposal when information is in high demand, as it is during the approval process, and engaging in legislative deliberations, such as hearings and public policy councils, CSOs can inform the debate over the budget and influence its direction.<sup>32</sup>
- CSOs with technical skills can contribute to the approval process by analysing the revenue and expenditure policies being proposed and providing this analysis to legislators to help them more clearly understand the issues related to the budget and make better decisions. CSOs' expert analyses and testimony can influence the debate, highlight important issues about the impact of budget proposals on poor or marginalized communities, and even build the capacity of legislatures to analyse budgets and improve the quality of budget hearings and reports.<sup>33</sup>

## 3. Budget execution stage – CSOs can:

- Advocate for the executive to issue public reports regularly on the status of revenues and expenditures during the year, so CSOs and other actors can monitor the flow of funds.
- Analyse whether governments execute budgets as planned – this is specifically highlighted in SDG indicator 16.6.1, but is relevant across all the SDGs. CSOs can draw on national budget documents, as well as Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability data and the World Bank's BOOST data to check if governments are executing budgets as planned.
- Use in-year reports and mid-year reviews, which convey actual spending figures versus budget allo-

cations, to monitor whether funds allocated to specific projects, such as a road or school, have actually been used for the intended purpose.

- Assess the quality of the spending by using budget information and physically verifying the end result of the project to see if the policy goals associated with the budget allocation are being met, and if government funds are being used effectively.<sup>34</sup>

## 4. Budget oversight – CSOs can:

- Use audit reports, if they are published in a timely manner, to assess how well or poorly the budget has been implemented, and potentially uncover fraud, unauthorized or unsubstantiated expenditures, or systemic weaknesses in financial management practices in public sector agencies.<sup>35</sup>
- Engage with oversight bodies to report on issues of public concern and help identify potential audits.
- Engage in participatory audits to collect, collate and distribute information and hold a public hearing or discussion on audit findings and recommendations, and follow up with responsible agencies or actors.
- Engage the media and other accountability actors to report on audit findings and recommendations.

A variety of legal, institutional and political factors will affect the extent to which civil society can engage in the budget process. Such elements can seriously hinder the efforts of national and local organizations attempting to participate in the debate on the use of public resources for the SDGs. Although the challenges are substantial, there are increasing demands pushing governments to open their budgets through information and participation to achieve sustainable development dividends.

32 International Budget Partnership (2017). Making the Most of the Budget Cycle: The Budget Approval Phase. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/2017/06/making-budget-cycle-budget-approval-phase/>

33 *Ibid*

34 International Budget Partnership (2017). Making the Most of the Budget Cycle: The Budget Execution Stage. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/2017/08/making-budget-cycle-budget-execution-stage/>

35 International Budget Partnership (2017). Making the Most of the Budget Cycle: The Budget Oversight Stage. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/2018/04/making-budget-cycle-budget-oversight-stage/>



## Key Resources:

- **From Numbers to Nurses: Why Budget Transparency, Expenditure Monitoring, and Accountability are Vital to the Post-2015 Framework** shows that budget transparency, expenditure monitoring and accountability can contribute to increases in spending towards, and better results related to, development goals. The brief draws on a vast array of case studies, as well as quantitative analysis of new data sets, to examine the relationship between transparency, monitoring, spending and outcomes.

See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/budget-brief-no-27-from-numbers-to-nurses-why-budget-transparency-expenditure-monitoring-and-accountability-are-vital-to-the-post-2015-framework/>

- **Open the Books: Why We Need to Open Budgets and Doors to Budgetary Engagement to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals** outlines practical things that can be done to ensure that public money is being raised and spent to deliver critical public services, implement development priorities and hold governments to account.

See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/2017/09/open-budgets-to-achieve-sustainable-development-goals/>

- **Open Budgeting and Monitoring for the Sustainable Development Goals: A Country-level Perspective** is a blog post written in support of the International Budget Partnership's co-authored chapter and included in the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office report Financing the UN Development System: Pathways to Reposition for Agenda 2030 (September 2017). See: <http://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/UNDS-Financing-Report-2017.pdf#page=150>

- **Tracking Spending on the Sustainable Development Goals: What Have We Learned from the Millennium Development Goals?** is a budget brief that explores good practices and lessons learned from monitoring of government budgets and expenditure on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), featuring summaries of case studies from eleven countries. See: [https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/tracking-spending-sustainable-development-goals/?utm\\_source=advocacy\\_page&utm\\_campaign=SDGBrief](https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/tracking-spending-sustainable-development-goals/?utm_source=advocacy_page&utm_campaign=SDGBrief)

- **Budgeting for a Greener Planet** examines the formal accountability systems of four countries that will receive and manage substantial climate change funds (Bangladesh, India, Nepal and the Philippines). It serves as a tool in decision making and monitoring of the use of public funds for climate action and establishes a "climate finance accountability framework." See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/budgeting-greener-planet/>

- **The Impacts of Fiscal Openness: A Review of the Evidence** provides the first systematic review covering 38 empirical studies published between 1991 and early 2015, highlights gaps and sets out a research agenda that consists of: (a) disaggregating broad measures of budget transparency to uncover which specific disclosures are related to outcomes; (b) tracing causal mechanisms to connect fiscal openness interventions with ultimate impacts on human development; (c) investigating the relative effectiveness of alternative interventions; (d) examining the relationship between transparency and participation; and (e) clarifying the contextual conditions that support particular interventions. See: <http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/resourcesfiles/files/20150704112.pdf>

- **International Budget Partnership guides.** See: [https://www.internationalbudget.org/search/keyword/guide/type/ibp\\_publications/](https://www.internationalbudget.org/search/keyword/guide/type/ibp_publications/)

- **Financing for Development: Progress and Prospects 2018** report highlights basic information needed to track sector spending, budget implementation, and the goals and outcomes of spending. See: [https://developmentfinance.un.org/sites/developmentfinance.un.org/files/Report\\_IATF\\_2018.pdf](https://developmentfinance.un.org/sites/developmentfinance.un.org/files/Report_IATF_2018.pdf)

- **Our Money, Our Responsibility: A Citizens' Guide to Monitoring Government Expenditures** (IBP Guide, 2008). See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/our-money-our-responsibility-a-citizens-guide-to-monitoring-government-expenditures/>

- **Guide to Transparency in Government Budget Reports: How Civil Society Can Use Budget Reports for Research and Advocacy** (IBP Guide, 2011). See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/guide-to-transparency-in-government-budget-reports-how-civil-society-can-use-budget-reports-for-research-and-advocacy/>
- **The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Auditing and Public Finance Management** (IBP Paper, 2005). See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/publications/the-role-of-civil-society-organizations-in-auditing-and-public-finance-management/>
- **Other International Budget Partnership guides**. See: [https://www.internationalbudget.org/search/keyword/guide/type/ibp\\_publications/](https://www.internationalbudget.org/search/keyword/guide/type/ibp_publications/)

### Case Study: Aligning Strategic Frameworks and Engaging Budget Officials

**Tanzania:** The implementation of the SDGs in Tanzania falls under the Five-Year Development Plan II (FYDP II) framework requiring local authorities to integrate the goals in their strategic plans. To ensure local authorities were familiar with the SDGs and aligned the FYDP II with their strategies, the Local Governance Working Group of Policy Forum, an NGO Network, developed a policy brief and engaged with the Parliamentary Committee for Administration and Local Government. The brief focused on the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), analysing budget allocation trends in relation to the implementation progress of SDGs, particularly Goal 3 on health and Goal 4 on education. The analysis further looks at the budget allocation trends within the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MoHCDEC), and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Through their engagement, the Policy Forum was able to identify champions to push the SDG agenda during parliamentary discussions and also organize a strategic session with PO-RALG management to promote better SDG and FYDP II alignment. In addition, the network collaborated with the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform to train PO-RALG management and other staff on the FYDP II, Agenda 2063, 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. As a result of such training and engagement, PO-RALG staff and councillors have a better understanding of the alignment between the SDGs and development plans, as well as the budget process, resource management and value for money.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Policy Forum, case study (2018).

# Mobilizing Parliamentarians

## What is it?

A parliament – or legislature – is the body of government responsible for making the laws of a country. Composed of representatives or politicians representing different geographical areas or constituencies, a modern parliament tends to have the following core functions: law-making; budgeting; oversight of government bodies, especially the executive branch of government; and representing the interests of citizens. In performing these functions, parliamentarians may use a number of procedures such as: introducing legislation and amending laws; scrutinizing ministers, civil servants and other government actors through questions, holding inquiries and hearings to receive expert evidence; and gaining access to official documents and information.

## Why is it important?

Parliaments play an important role in ensuring the implementation and monitoring of and compliance with international commitments at the national level. They are, in essence, the institutions formally in charge of making governments accountable for their international commitments. Notably, the 2030 Agenda acknowledges “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.”<sup>37</sup>

Parliaments can promote accountability for the SDGs in a number of ways. They can make or amend laws to ensure consistency with the 2030 Agenda. They can monitor the actions of the government and its agencies in implementing the SDGs. They can assess overall progress on the SDGs through periodic reports tabled in parliament. They can evaluate budgets and ensure an adequate allocation of financial resources to achieve the SDGs. They can also hold public hearings and inquiries on issues relevant to the SDGs, stimulating public debate in relation to policies to attain the SDGs, and providing opportunities for experts and citizens to offer their views on what is or isn't working on the ground. Moreover, the role that parliamentarians play in representing their constituents' interests is vital to SDG accountability, especially for vulnerable or marginalized groups who may have few avenues in which to raise their concerns.

## How can it be used?

Citizens have the right to provide input into the work of parliaments<sup>38</sup> and there are a number of ways that CSOs can engage, educate and mobilize parliaments and parliamentarians in relation to accountability for the 2030 Agenda, including the following actions:

**1. Engage with individual Members of Parliaments (MPs)** – CSOs should seek to meet with, lobby and build relationships with individual MPs in order to promote accountability for the SDGs. In particular, CSOs should:

<sup>37</sup> United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 45.

<sup>38</sup> According to the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness: “Parliament has a duty to actively engage citizens and civil society, without discrimination, in parliamentary processes and decision-making in order to effectively represent citizen interests and to give effect to the right of citizens to petition their government.” Cited in: The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 222.

## The potential limits of parliamentary action for accountability for the SDGs

Parliaments vary greatly in their composition, structure and mandate, and not all parliaments will necessarily be able or willing to play an active role in SDG accountability. In some cases, a lack of parliamentary openness may mean that citizens are not informed about the work of parliament and thus are restricted from engaging with parliamentarians. According to the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament, many parliaments do not provide public access to a variety of critical legislative documents that are necessary for citizens to be able to influence the parliamentary decision-making process, and even when such information is publicly available, it may not be presented in a manner that enables broad participation.<sup>39</sup> In other cases, parliaments may not have the capacity to take on the heavy demands of the SDGs<sup>40</sup> or there may be a lack of parliamentary oversight, with limited powers for parliaments to monitor or challenge the executive branch of government. Given these realities, it is essential that civil society actors assess – on an individual basis – the extent to which their parliament can support and promote accountability for the SDGs.

**a. Educate MPs on the SDGs and their role as parliamentarians in SDG accountability** – CSOs can ensure that parliamentarians are well-informed about the SDGs and the role that they, as MPs, can play in advancing accountability for the 2030 Agenda. In particular, CSOs can educate MPs – especially newly elected ones – on the use of their legislative, budgetary and oversight powers to further accountability for the SDGs.

**b. Encourage MPs to legislate in relation to the SDGs** – For example, CSOs can urge and support MPs to endorse or adopt the 2030 Agenda in Parliament, ensure that current laws are consistent with the SDGs, and propose new legislation in support of the SDGs.

**c. Urge MPs to use their oversight role to monitor progress and action on the SDGs** – CSOs can encourage MPs to monitor progress on the SDGs – for example, through regular progress reports or updates in Parliament – as well as to monitor and challenge the government's actions in implementing the Agenda including its budgetary allocations. CSOs should urge MPs to use existing parliamentary processes – such as open debates, parliamentary 'question time' or 'interpellations'<sup>41</sup> – to question ministers on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to draw attention to particular SDG issues.



### TIPS for engaging with individual Members of Parliament (MPs):

- Seek to engage with MPs as early as possible in their term – ideally within their first year of office – in order to maximize impact in the long-term.
- Build positive relationships with the staff of MPs, who often play a key role in organizing their day-to-day calendars and may influence their policy and legislative priorities.
- Seek to engage with MPs from all political parties. Governments change and MPs in opposition can often become influential ministers within only a few years
- Ensure that MPs have the power to put your recommendation or "asks" into action.
- Target or create champion MPs for the SDGs who will be influential in pushing accountability for the 2030 Agenda forward.

**2. Engage with parliamentary committees and working groups** – CSOs should engage with parliamentary committees that address issues related to the SDGs, including permanent standing committees as well as ad hoc committees that deal with specific tasks. Parliaments may mainstream the SDGs across existing parliamentary committees and/or establish a dedicated

<sup>39</sup> The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 224. The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness (section 2, provisions 13-26) contains a comprehensive list of information that parliaments should make available, as does the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites.

<sup>40</sup> CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> In many countries, the legislature will have a process that enables any legislator to ask a question of a minister on any issue they choose. In parliamentary systems, this is known as "Question Time," whereas in other systems the process involves what are called "interpellations." TAP Network (2016), Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 26.

committee or working group on the SDGs.<sup>42</sup> As a starting point, CSOs should determine whether the SDGs have been included in the formal mandate of one or more committees and whether a specific committee on the SDGs has been created.

CSO engagement with parliamentary committees may take a variety of forms, including: educating committees on the SDGs through information seminars and training sessions; offering briefings, feedback and/or oral or written submissions to committees on SDG implementation (e.g. what is or is not working); and providing technical advice and expertise on SDG issues. CSOs can also advocate to influential parliamentary committees to have a thematic focus on the SDGs broadly or on specific goals or targets.



**TIP:** CSOs can support the creation of informal cross-party mechanisms – such as parliamentary friendship groups – to focus on the SDGs or specific SDG issues. In many countries, issues-based legislative “friendship groups” exist within legislatures, bringing cross-party groups of legislators together around a particular cause.<sup>43</sup>

**3. Participate in parliamentary hearing and inquiries** – Parliamentary inquiries and hearings provide spaces where governments can be held responsible for their SDG commitments.<sup>44</sup> One way that CSOs can engage with parliaments is by giving oral or written submissions on SDG implementation and/or review to parliamentary hearings and inquiries. Notably, the 2030 Agenda recognizes the role of national parliaments in supporting processes for regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels.<sup>45</sup>

Parliamentary committees should have the power to call public hearings to garner citizens’ views on implementation as well as to call on government officials to provide information on the impact of its policies.<sup>46</sup> Such hearings can also offer a mechanism for parliaments to receive citizen input on draft or existing legislation in relation to the SDGs.

**4. Help connect citizens to parliamentarians** – CSOs can play a key role in bridging the gap between legislators and citizens in relation to SDG implementation and review by organizing lobbying campaigns – such as letter writing campaigns – as well as constituent visits in

## Innovative ways to engage parliaments

CSOs should consider innovative ways to engage with parliaments and parliamentarians in order to further accountability for the 2030 Agenda, including through the use of new technologies. In particular, CSOs can support the development and use of digital platforms and capacities – such as social media, mobile and SMS technology – to enable citizen engagement with parliamentarians.<sup>47</sup> Many parliaments are adopting the use of digital technologies as low-cost ways to reach citizens in various geographic locations or who lack the means to participate in-person.<sup>48</sup> Such technologies can be used by CSOs and citizens to offer direct feedback to parliamentarians on SDG implementation and review, provide comments on draft legislation, or submit letters or questions to elected representatives in a public forum.<sup>49</sup>

42 CESR and UN Women (2017). pp. 11-12.

43 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 31.

44 CESR and UN Women (2017). p. 12.

45 United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 79.

46 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2016). Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals: A self-assessment toolkit, p. 12. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2017-01/parliaments-and-sustainable-development-goals-self-assessment-toolkit>

47 The Open Government Partnership (2014). p. 233.

48 *Ibid*

49 *Ibid*

parliamentarians' electorates or districts. As elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians have an obligation to engage with their constituents throughout their term of office and not just during election times.<sup>50</sup>

CSOs facilitating outreach and communication between citizens and their representatives can help parliamentarians identify gaps and weaknesses in SDG

implementation that may not be apparent in general government reports or national statistics.<sup>51</sup> Regular dialogue with parliamentarians also allows citizens to provide information and insights on local implementation of the SDGs, and may encourage parliamentarians to place additional pressure on governments to implement the 2030 Agenda.

## Key Resources:

- ***Engaging parliaments on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: representation, accountability and implementation, A handbook for civil society (2018)***, produced by Together 2030, provides guidance on how to engage with parliaments and parliamentarians to promote, support and track the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. See: <https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Engaging-parliaments-on-the-2030-Agenda-and-the-SDGs.pdf>
- ***Parliaments and the Sustainable Development Goals: A self-assessment toolkit (2016)***, by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UNDP provides parliaments with the framework to evaluate their readiness to engage on the SDGs and seeks to help parliamentarians identify good practices, opportunities and lessons learned to institutionalize and mainstream the SDGs into the legislative process. See: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2017-01/parliaments-and-sustainable-development-goals-self-assessment-toolkit>
- ***The Inter-Parliamentary Union*** is the organization of national parliaments that works with parliaments to safeguard peace and drive positive democratic change through political dialogue and concrete action. See: [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

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<sup>50</sup> IPU and UNDP (2016), p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*

## Case Study: Ensuring Institutional Memory of SDG Work through Relationship-Building Efforts with National Parliamentarians

**Sierra Leone:** In June 2017, Sierra Leone Coalition 2030, a civil society alliance for the SDGs, held a capacity-building retreat with 25 MPs. The training targeted the most strategic figures in parliamentary work on the SDGs: members of the informal Parliamentary Action Group on the SDGs and parliamentary leadership, including the Deputy Speaker, the Majority Leader and others. In order to maintain institutional memory beyond the electoral term, the training also engaged parliamentary clerks. The participants expressed the need to gain more knowledge on the SDGs to be better equipped to carry out their representation, oversight and monitoring functions. In addition to providing technical capacity, the training was also used as an opportunity to develop a memorandum of understanding setting out a plan for continuous engagement between the civil society alliance and members of the Parliamentary Action Group on the SDGs.<sup>52</sup>

**Denmark:** In 2016, Global Focus, a Danish network comprising 80 development and humanitarian CSOs decided to become more involved with the Danish parliament and government on the 2030 Agenda. One of the main challenges was the need to develop new relationships with MPs and government representatives beyond their existing allies in order to increase CSO influence on SDG implementation. Global Focus partnered with other networks and organizations, including the Danish 92-group (which focuses on the environment), the private sector, unions and local authorities to organize a major multi-stakeholder conference in the spring of 2017. More than 150 CSOs, politicians, government representatives and other stakeholders debated Denmark's implementation of the SDGs at home and abroad. Following up on the conference, a Danish Social Democrat established an all-party coalition on the SDGs in the Danish Parliament with the purpose of engaging policy makers and civil society with the 2030 Agenda. The Coalition currently has 46 MPs, including representatives from all political parties, and meets several times throughout the year. Having demonstrated its capabilities to mobilize a wide range of stakeholders for the 2030 Agenda, Global Focus was invited to provide support to the Coalition's secretariat and advisory board, in partnership with the Danish 92- group. This has translated into closer, institutionalized engagement with members from almost all parties within the Danish parliament, with strategic opportunities to promote issues on the parliament's agenda and to recommend speakers for debates and discussions related to the SDGs.<sup>53</sup>

52 Together 2030. Engaging Parliaments, p. 34. <https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Engaging-parliaments-on-the-2030-Agenda-and-the-SDGs.pdf>

53 Together 2030. Engaging Parliaments, p. 41. <https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Engaging-parliaments-on-the-2030-Agenda-and-the-SDGs.pdf>

# Engaging with Local Authorities

## What is it?

In the context of the SDGs, local authorities are those individuals and institutions who are accountable for the delivery of the goals at the local level. Local authorities vary by context, but in general include a combination of elected and appointed officials, civil servants, and service providers.

**1. Elected officials** include mayors, local councils, committees and boards, and are typically elected by a local constituency. These officials provide overall oversight for local development priorities. For example, mayors hold civil servants accountable and can help ensure that budgets are matched to community priorities (SDG targets 16.6, 16.7).

**2. Appointed officials** vary by context but are typically appointed by elected officials to deliver on priorities defined by the current government. These officials may include district education or health officers, finance officers, police chiefs and prosecutors. For example, a police chief might have special responsibility to deliver on a government's promise to ensure children are safe from violence (SDG target 16.2).

**3. Civil servants** are typically hired for their technical expertise; their jobs endure from one government to the next. Civil servants include health, education or water and sanitation experts at district or subdistrict offices and are accountable for ensuring the technical quality of service delivery. For example, a district water and sanitation officer might be accountable for ensuring that water points and sewage systems meet government standards (SDG target 6).

**4. Service providers** are frequently considered the “front line” of the SDG because they provide the services that are crucial to the delivery of the SDGs. For example, teachers are accountable for delivering quality education in order to achieve SDG 4; doctors and nurses are accountable for delivering quality health care to advance SDG 3; and agricultural extension workers are accountable for helping farmers produce enough nutritious food to help meet SDG 2.

## Why is it important?

In many ways, local authorities are the touchstone of SDG accountability because they provide the frontline basic services required for development and have direct contact with the very people the SDGs are meant to serve. Their actions help to make the SDGs real in the lives of communities.

However, even though local authorities might be closest to communities, their power to make decisions about local laws, resources and services that advance the SDGs will largely depend upon the degree to which a country has decentralized, the political will at the centre and the effectiveness of intergovernmental financial transfers. In more highly decentralized contexts, local authorities may have more discretion and resources, depending on whether resources support delineated service functions and responsibilities, which can prove challenging in many countries. This can be crucial to contextualizing the SDGs and ensuring their accountable delivery. In centralized contexts, local authorities play an important role in ensuring that laws and services are administered in ways that fulfil centrally set policies



and budgets with a high degree of quality. However, the optimal mix of decentralization and centralization for effective local service delivery is still a matter of experimentation in many countries, as well as international research and debate.

As CSOs and communities consider how best to engage with local authorities, it is important to analyse in detail what the decentralized governance arrangements are, where service responsibilities lie, what budget supports these functions and whether that budget is received or not. Specifically, which government entity is responsible for what service function and do they have the resources to deliver it? These are key questions for CSOs to understand in their respective countries in order to foster participatory governance, which has been demonstrated to impact service delivery, and thus, achieve the SDGs.

## How can it be used?

CSOs can engage with, and facilitate communities to directly connect to, local authorities to ensure that the SDGs actually deliver on the ground for communities. Towards this end, CSOs should think critically about the spaces that exist for engagement.

**1. Engage local authorities in “formal” or “invited” spaces** – “Formal” or “invited” spaces, are administered by the government and open to public participation. Elections are the most common example of “invited” spaces for public participation. Elections carry consequences for elected and appointed government officials who do not perform their duties accountably. But between elections, governments often open spaces for input by communities and civil society which can open opportunities to ensure the accountable delivery of the SDGs. For example, CSOs and communities can:

**a. Participate in city, village, and town council meetings** – These meetings often include space in agendas for public comment. Organized communities and civil society groups can use these meetings to highlight ways that SDG-related services or laws could be more accountably delivered.

**b. Participate in service-specific meetings** – Convened by

local authorities, these include “School Management Committees,” “Village Health Committees,” “WASH committees,” and “Child Protection Committees,” and can offer important opportunities for communities and CSOs to engage directly with service providers about the detailed operations of services, many of which make or break the delivery of the SDGs.

**c. Facilitate community access to grievance redress mechanisms or “GRMs”** – GRMs offer opportunities for communities to report (sometimes anonymously) problems with service delivery by post, telephone, or internet so that local governments can take action. Sometimes, complaints must be publicly disclosed so that the CSOs and the broader public can more easily identify patterns that require systemic reform.

**d. Support or advocate for participatory budgeting mechanisms** – These can provide communities and civil society with opportunities to help define how discretionary local resources are spent. These meetings can help prioritize expenditures and include opportunities to ensure that they are accountably spent.

**2. Engage local authorities in “informal” or “claimed” spaces** – “Informal” or “claimed” spaces are opportunities for dialogue that are brokered by civil society or communities rather than government. Some of the most promising approaches for engaging local authorities are termed “social accountability” approaches.<sup>54</sup> These approaches typically serve to gather crucial evidence about local level service delivery and mobilize the political power of local communities to press local authorities for improvements. For example, CSOs and communities can:

**a. Conduct social audits**, by which communities and CSOs measure the degree to which services have the staff and inputs required under local law. For example: social audits of schools might measure whether teacher-pupil ratios match national policy; and social audits of water services might measure whether water points are built to standards defined under national policy.

**b. Facilitate community score cards** – This tool allows focus groups – including marginalized groups – to measure the degree to which services are meeting performance criteria that are defined by communities

### Sample SDG Scorecard Review Framework<sup>55</sup>

| 1. No Policy/Plan  | 2. Initial planning phase  | 3. Plans or actions started  | 4. Delivery Underway  | 5. Successful Implementation                 |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| a) No/weak Policy/legal framework available                                  | Policy/legal framework in planning phase                           | Some Policy/legal framework available                                    | Policy/legal framework agreed   | Strong Policy/legal framework in use         |
| b) No/weak plans and strategies exist  | Plans & strategies in planning stage                               | Some Plans and strategies exist  | Plans & strategies agreed   | Strong Plans and strategies exist            |
| c) No/weak Agencies with clear mandate available                             | Agencies planning their engagement                                 | Some Agencies with clear mandate available                               | Agencies beginning to develop their implementation                            | Strong Agencies available with clear mandate |
| d) No/weak implementation of policies, plans and strategies on regular basis | Implementation of policies, plans and strategies in planning phase | Some implementation of policies, plans and strategies on irregular basis | Implementation of policies, plans and strategies has started across all areas | Strong Agencies available with clear mandate |

themselves. For example, communities and CSOs might measure their satisfaction with their last experience with a clinic or agricultural extension service, or investigate how a service is performing for a particularly marginalized group. These results correspond directly to SDG indicator 16.6.2.

**c. Conduct citizen report cards** –These participatory local level surveys are designed to help clarify community opinions about certain types of service delivery.

**d. Convene “interface meetings”** –The evidence from score cards, social audits, or citizen report cards can serve as the basis for dialogue and the creation of an

action plan to improve services. Interface meetings are typically driven by communities themselves and demonstrate collective political power in ways that researcher-driven evidence may not.

When deployed strategically, the social accountability approaches described above can lead to important impact on development outcomes at the local level.<sup>56</sup> In addition, CSOs sometimes work together to monitor services across whole regions, aggregate evidence, and press for more systemic change.<sup>57</sup> This type of “vertical integration” is particularly important for creating the kind of grassroots-to-global accountability needed in the context of the SDGs.<sup>58</sup>

### Key Resources:

- **World Bank Sourcebook: 21 Social Accountability Tools** provides detailed implementation instructions for the use of social accountability tools to engage local authorities. See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/513571468059674130/pdf/718040WP00PUBL0ebook0English0Final0.pdf>
- **CARE Community Score Card** serves as the basis of much of the social accountability work of the past two decades. See: [https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/FP-2013-CARE\\_CommunityScoreCardToolkit.pdf](https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/FP-2013-CARE_CommunityScoreCardToolkit.pdf)
- **Citizen Voice and Action: World Vision’s Approach to Social Accountability**, produced by World Vision, contextualizes and applies its social accountability approach in more than 40 countries with positive results. See: [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/CVA\\_Field\\_Guide\\_0.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/CVA_Field_Guide_0.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> See full scorecard and other resources for engaging with local authorities at <https://action4sd.org/>

<sup>56</sup> Fox, Jonathan A. (2015). Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say? <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15000704>

<sup>57</sup> Fox, Jonathan A. et al (2016). Doing accountability differently: A proposal for the vertical integration of civil society monitoring and advocacy. <https://www.u4.no/publications/doing-accountability-differently-a-proposal-for-the-vertical-integration-of-civil-society-monitoring-and-advocacy.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> World Vision (2015). Grassroots to Global Policy Report: Seven Steps to Citizen-Driven Accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals. [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Grassroots%20to%20Global\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Grassroots%20to%20Global_Report_FINAL.pdf)

- **The Engine Room Guide to Participatory Budgeting** reflects 30 years of practice of participatory budgeting from around the world. See: <https://library.theengineroom.org/participatory-budgeting/>
- **The Global Partnership for Social Accountability** is a multi-donor trust fund and learning hub dedicated to supporting engagement between CSOs and local governments through social accountability. The GPSA hosts learning events, publishes a newsletter, and convenes an annual forum for practitioners. See: <https://www.thegpsa.org/>
- The **Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action in Health** share an interest and passion for the field of community monitoring for accountability in health. See: <https://www.copasah.net/>
- **Accountability Research Centre** collaborates with partners to contribute to global thinking on how to improve public accountability and build more inclusive societies. Includes a regular newsletter and a focus on local level accountability. See: <https://accountabilityresearch.org/about/>
- The World Bank's **Open Knowledge Repository** provides more information about grievance redress mechanisms. See: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20117>
- **Participatory Budgeting**, a report from the World Bank's Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series, advances provides tools and lessons from practices in improving the efficiency and equity of public services provision and strengthening institutions of accountability in governance. See: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PSGLP/Resources/ParticipatoryBudgeting.pdf>
- Learn more about social audits in the Centre for Good Governance's report, **Social Audits: A Toolkit – A Guide for Performance Improvement and Outcome Measurement**. See: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/cgg/unpan023752.pdf>
- Learn more about how to develop effective community scorecards in GAC in Projects report, **How-to Notes – Rapid Feedback: The Role of Community Scorecards in Improving Service Delivery**. See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/462221468333561977/pdf/884970WP0Rapid00Box385225B00PUBLIC0.pdf>
- Learn more about spaces for engagement in the Institute of Development Studies report, **Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development**. See: [https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/making\\_spaces\\_changing\\_places.pdf](https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/making_spaces_changing_places.pdf)

### Case Study: Utilizing Scorecards, Social Audits and Other Participatory Budgeting Mechanisms

**Uganda:** World Vision's approach to social accountability combines score cards, social audits and interface meetings within a long-term development approach. The approach has led to important improvements in health and education outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

**Brazil:** Researchers in Brazil show that municipal governments that adopted participatory budgeting spent more on education and sanitation. Infant mortality declined in these areas.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> World Vision. Citizen Voice and Action: Civic demand for better health and education services. <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B01TNkdj61ccVhIUU1dzN00Dg/edit>

<sup>60</sup> The Washington Post (2014). Brazil let its citizens make decisions about city budgets. Here's what happened. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/22/brazil-let-its-citizens-make-decisions-about-city-budgets-heres-what-happened/?utm\\_term=.c7398d7388e6&noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/22/brazil-let-its-citizens-make-decisions-about-city-budgets-heres-what-happened/?utm_term=.c7398d7388e6&noredirect=on)

### Case Study: Implementing a Public Expenditure Tracking System with Local Authorities

**Tanzania:** A four-member team from three CSOs worked with local authorities in Tanzania to carry out a budget assessment and implement a public expenditure tracking system in the rural Mbulu District. The team conducted a visit to the District's headquarters and held a discussion with District officials from the education and planning departments. In addition, the CSOs reviewed documents including the District Strategic Plan, Medium Term Expenditure Framework, and quarterly reports. Three primary schools and three secondary schools from six different wards were selected for data collection and verification of construction activities. The team carried out discussions with teachers, community leaders and members at the grass-roots level.<sup>61</sup>

### Case Study: Engaging Local Authorities through Grassroots Community Meetings

**South Sudan:** In Juba City Municipality, South Sudan, from 2015-2016, UNA South Sudan implemented Local Development Forums (LDFs), enabling 15 grassroots communities to engage with their local authorities on the SDGs, particularly on transparency and accountability. The LDFs empowered the communities through learning processes, skills and knowledge formation that enabled them to articulate their development needs and priorities and hold service providers accountable. The LDFs are a long-term program aimed at mobilizing communities to participate fully and effectively in identifying and monitoring the quality of service delivery being offered to them by the government and other public actors. By ensuring the participation of women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities as the primary beneficiaries, the LDFs became a great asset in underserved communities across South Sudan. Secondary beneficiaries included policy makers who benefited from the synergy of working with the poor in determining choices and priorities for development programs and processes. This collaboration strengthens confidence and respect for those in power, thereby improving working relationships with community members. Challenges of the LDFs implementation included: lack of skilled personnel; inadequate financial resources; lack of timely cooperation by public officials; and difficulties in accessing relevant information. Nonetheless, the LDFs led to improved service delivery, increased development effectiveness, and empowered citizens at the grassroots level in Juba City Municipality.<sup>62</sup>

61 CSYM HUDUMA Christian Spiritual Youth Ministry (2018). Case study.

62 United Nations Association of South Sudan (UNA South Sudan) (2018). Case study.



# Working with Formal Processes



# Contributing to Voluntary National Reviews (VNR)

## What is it?

Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are an essential part of the formal follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda. Presented every year at the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) during its three-day ministerial segment in July, these reviews are supposed to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.<sup>63</sup> VNRs provide the opportunity for countries to share their individual experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating SDG implementation.

VNRs typically consist of the following broad phases: initial preparation and organization; preparation of the VNR report; presentation at the HLPF; and follow-up after the HLPF.<sup>64</sup> Stakeholder engagement may occur throughout all of these phases. The main guidance for countries preparing for VNRs is the updated UN Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, which provide a framework for common elements for the reviews.<sup>65</sup> While there is no frequency for reporting mandated for VNRs, the UN Secretary-General has recommended that all countries conduct at least two VNRs

during the 15-year period of the SDGs.<sup>66</sup> By the end of July 2018, more than half of all UN Member States had presented VNRs at the HLPF.<sup>67</sup>

## Why is it important?

VNRs are a key tool for accountability for the SDGs at both the national and global level. As the main mechanism for tracking progress on the SDGs at the national level and reporting on it at the global level, VNRs provide an important opportunity for countries to be answerable to their citizens in relation to their implementation of the SDGs, especially for members of civil society who have limited space to participate in SDG accountability processes at a national level.

VNR reports are expected to show what steps a country has taken to implement the 2030 Agenda and provide an assessment of the results on the ground including successes, challenges, gaps in implementation, possible solutions and emerging issues. As a tool for accountability, the VNR process can strengthen national ownership of the SDGs, promote transparency, inclusiveness and participation in reporting on the SDGs, and support more effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>68</sup> Given the 2030 Agenda's voluntary nature, VNRs may be seen as a norm-building process, in which individual

63 United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 84.

64 UN DSD and UN DESA (2018). Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, p. 9.

65 Voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum for sustainable development (HLPF). [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated\\_Voluntary\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated_Voluntary_Guidelines.pdf)

66 Report of the Secretary General, Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, para. 80.

67 The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2018). Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda, p. 18.

68 UNDG (2017). Guidelines, p. 9.

countries' best practices may persuade others to follow suit and set standards for the international community.

## How can it be used?

Although VNR presentations take place at the global level, there are a number of ways in which stakeholders – including CSOs and citizens – can participate in, influence and/or contribute to VNR processes at the national level. In particular, CSOs can engage in the following actions:

**1. Determine whether the country has volunteered for a VNR** – CSOs should investigate whether their country has volunteered to present a VNR by reviewing the list of volunteer countries on the HLPF website: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>. The website should also identify country focal point(s) for the review as well as relevant reports.

**2. Determine whether there are mechanisms or processes for involving civil society in preparing for the VNR** – CSOs should establish if there will be stakeholder involvement in preparing for the VNR by identifying and contacting the entity within the government responsible for the overall coordination of the VNR. This could be an existing body or institution, or an ad hoc arrangement such as a lead department/agency or an integrated, inter-ministerial group, coordinating office or committee.<sup>69</sup> CSOs should also consider contacting UN focal points in the country that may be involved in facilitating or supporting stakeholder engagement.<sup>70</sup>



**TIP:** Be proactive in reaching out to governments in relation to VNR preparations, as many governments may not have a process for outreach and engagement with CSOs.<sup>71</sup>

**3. Raise awareness of the VNR among civil society and other stakeholders** – CSOs can play a key role in

building public awareness and disseminating information about the VNR process including information about national consultations. CSOs may wish to engage the media to raise awareness of the VNR, create and maintain a network of CSO contacts to share information and foster understanding of the VNR process and its importance, and/or utilize social media to promote public interest and engagement.<sup>72</sup>

**4. Participate in government consultations or hold independent consultations** – CSOs should seek to participate in any in-person or online stakeholder consultations held by the government to prepare for the VNR. Ideally, governments should solicit verbal and written inputs from all stakeholders in the preparation of VNR reports.<sup>73</sup> Where governments lack the capacity to hold consultations, CSOs may wish to conduct independent consultations to provide inputs to the VNR report. According to one CSO, conducting or supporting VNR consultations can be an effective way to ensure that the voices of marginalized or vulnerable groups are included in the VNR process in a more legitimate and representative manner.<sup>74</sup>



**TIP:** Consider offering advice or practical support to governments well in advance of consultations in order to ensure that the consultation process is conducted in a meaningful, inclusive, participatory, transparent and accessible manner for all.

**5. Review the draft VNR report** – In some cases, CSOs and other stakeholders may have the opportunity to provide feedback and comments on a draft VNR report. Where CSOs have this opportunity, they should ensure that the report contains the following information:

*a. A review of all 17 SDGs* given the universal and inter-related nature of the 2030 Agenda;

*b. An overview of stakeholder engagement* in SDG implementation and review processes at national and

69 UN DSD and UN DESA (2018). Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, p. 10.

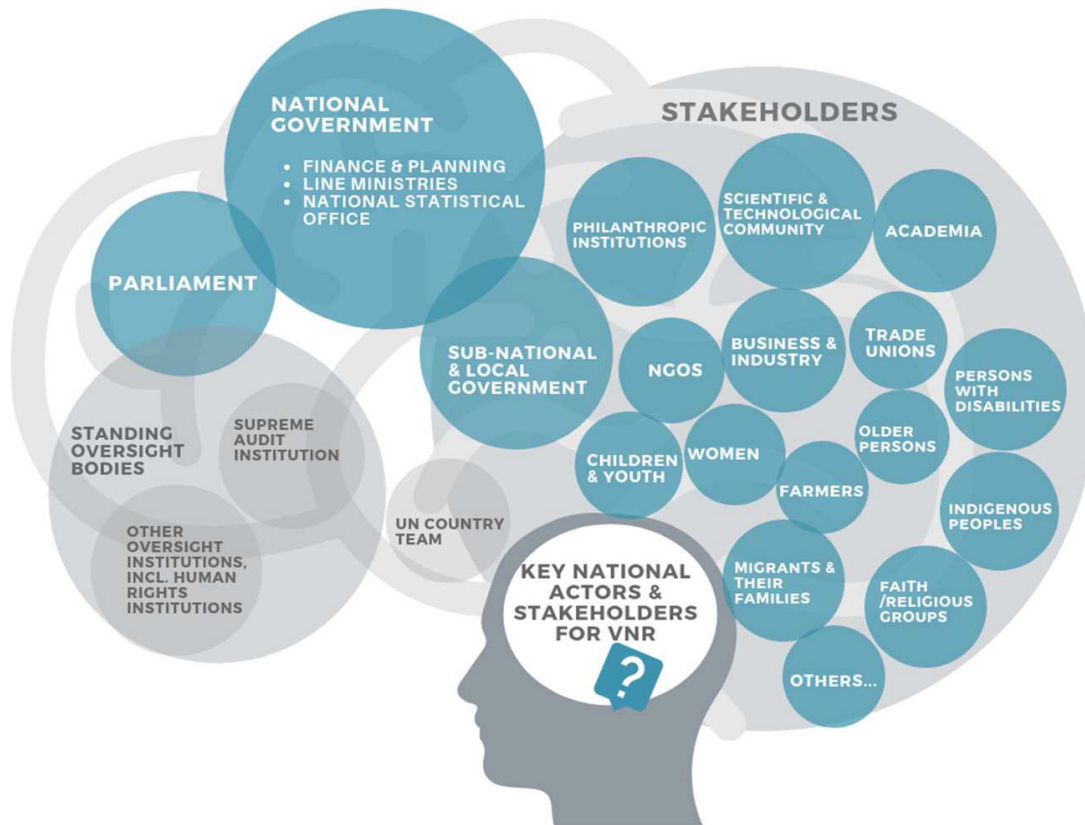
70 UN Women (2018). p. 35.

71 Sightsavers (2017). Civil society engagement in the voluntary national review process: Sightsavers' experience in 2016-17. Reflection paper, p. 1.

72 Amnesty International (2016). Sustainable Development Goals: A Practical Guide for National Action and Accountability, p. 13. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ACT1046992016ENGLISH.PDF>

73 CCIC (2018). p. 28.

74 Sightsavers (2017). p. 2.



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subnational levels, including opportunities for broad stakeholder participation in preparing for the VNR;

*c. A summary of national-level accountability processes and how the government plans to review progress in the future, including plans for future HLPF reporting;*<sup>76</sup>

*d. A dedicated section on and/or cross-cutting approach to the pledge to 'leave no one behind' that outlines the status and situation of vulnerable and marginalized groups – including any available data – as well as initiatives to improve their situation;*<sup>77</sup> and

*e. Recommendations or information from existing human rights reporting that align with the SDGs.*<sup>78</sup> [For information on using human rights reporting in VNRs,

see chapter on International Human Rights Mechanisms.]

**6. Provide independent contributions to VNR reports** – CSOs should urge governments to include independent contributions, comments or inputs from other stakeholders in the VNR report. A number of VNR countries – including Denmark, Cyprus, Netherlands and Sweden – included stakeholder-generated content in their 2017 VNR reports with contributions from stakeholders such as youth, civil society, academia and business.<sup>79</sup>

**7. Produce a civil society shadow report** – CSOs may wish to produce a civil society SDG progress report to challenge or provide an alternative perspective of SDG implementation to their country's official VNR report.

<sup>75</sup> UN DESA (2018). Handbook for Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR\\_hanbook\\_2019\\_Edition\\_For\\_Print10122018Foreword-Graphic\\_update.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_For_Print10122018Foreword-Graphic_update.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> CCIC (2018). p. vi.


<sup>77</sup> The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2018), Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda, p. 38.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>79</sup> DIHR 2018, Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda, p. 33.



These reports are particularly important where civil society has little or no opportunity to engage in official VNR processes at the national level. Shadow reports may be produced in partnership with civil society coalitions, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), academia or other stakeholders. [For more information on producing civil society reports, see chapter on civil society reporting.]

 **TIP:** CSOs should try to work in coalition with other CSOs to effectively influence VNRs. Supporting the development of coalitions and strengthening the collective ability to influence are key activities to influencing the VNR process and its outcomes.<sup>80</sup>

 **TIP:** CSOs wishing to attend their country's VNR in an independent capacity must register in advance and will need UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consultative status or to be on the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) Roster.<sup>81</sup>

**8. Participate in the review at the HLPF** – Some national-level CSOs may have the opportunity to attend or participate in their country's VNR at the international level. Notably, a number of countries that have presented VNRs have included stakeholder representatives within their official delegation to the HLPF and, in some cases, within their official presentation.<sup>82</sup> CSOs attending the HLPF in an official or independent capacity

should consider organizing a roundtable or side event on their country's VNR, disseminating any civil society shadow reports and making official statements or asking questions to their country under review.<sup>83</sup>

**9. Pursue follow-up activities after the VNR** – There are a number of important actions that CSOs can pursue to promote accountability for the SDGs following their country's VNR presentation at the HLPF. In particular, CSOs should:

*a. Disseminate the national report and outcome of the VNR* at national and subnational levels and, if necessary, translate it into national and/or local languages;<sup>84</sup>

*b. Provide an assessment of the country's review* by issuing a press release, public statement or holding a press conference;<sup>85</sup>

*c. Hold a conference or meeting with non-governmental stakeholders* to reflect upon the VNR process and discuss next steps to influence SDG implementation and review;

*d. Pressure governments to follow through on promises and commitments* made in VNR reports or during national presentations; and

*e. Engage with governments to follow-up on the main findings of VNRs* and to discuss plans for future SDG implementation and review, including the government's plans to volunteer again for a VNR at the global level.<sup>86</sup>

## Key Resources:

- The **High-level Political Forum's website** provides a list of all countries that have volunteered or are intending to volunteer for a VNR. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>
- The **updated Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum for sustainable development (HLPF)**, provide a framework for common elements for VNR reviews. See: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated\\_Voluntary\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated_Voluntary_Guidelines.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> Sightsavers (2017), p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Information on registration for the HLPF each year is usually available here: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/>

<sup>82</sup> DIHR 2018, Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda, p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> Amnesty International (2016), p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> Amnesty International (2016), p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>86</sup> Together 2030 and World Vision International (2017). Guiding for Accountability: Together 2030 Recommendations for a revised set of guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), p. 5. <http://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/REV-FINAL-T30-Recommendations-for-VNR-guidelines-October-2017-2.pdf>

- **The Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (2019)**, produced by UN DESA and available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic, elaborates on the Secretary-General's guidelines on VNRs and provides practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing a VNR. See: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR\\_hanbook\\_2019\\_Edition\\_For\\_Print10122018ForewordGraphic\\_update.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_For_Print10122018ForewordGraphic_update.pdf)
- **The Guidelines to Support Country Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (2017)**, prepared by the UN Development Group (UNDG) contain tools and suggestions for preparing reviews at the national level, which can be used in the preparation of the VNR. See: <https://undg.org/document/guidelines-to-support-country-reporting-on-the-sustainable-developmentgoals/>
- **The Synthesis Reports of Voluntary National Reviews of previous years (2016 and 2017)**, produced by UN DESA, provide a snapshot of general characteristics of the VNRs for each year and contain additional examples of good practices and lessons learned for countries conducting VNRs. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>
- **Progressing National SDG Implementation: An Independent Assessment of the Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017 (2018)**, by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), highlights best practices as well as gaps in VNR reporting at the 2017 HLPF. See: <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ES-Eng.pdf>
- **Partners for Review** facilitates dialogue and peer learning on SDG reviews, bringing together representatives of the state, civil society, the private sector and academia to reflect on, discuss and share their experiences, good practices and lessons learned of national SDG review processes, both before and after VNR presentations at the HLPF. More information available at: <http://www.partners-for-review.de/>
- **Action for Sustainable Development (Action4SD)** works with civil society groups to monitor progress and public engagement in the national implementation of the SDGs including supporting member coalitions in a number of countries to submit shadow civil society reports for countries volunteering for VNRs. See: <https://action4sd.org>

## Case Study: Including Stakeholders in Preparations

**Global:** All 43 countries that reported to the 2017 HLPF included some element of stakeholder engagement in their preparations, but the level and modality varied across countries. The reports of some countries, such as **Benin, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Tajikistan and Thailand**, go into details about the diverse stakeholders consulted (CSOs, private sector, academia, youth, labour associations and local authorities, among others), while other countries are vaguer in their descriptions, referring to consultations with "relevant stakeholders." A few countries explicitly report on efforts to "reach those furthest behind" in their VNR preparations by carrying out consultations with vulnerable and marginalized groups. Costa Rica, for instance, carried out consultations with older persons, LGBTIQ persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous peoples, and includes a section under each SDG on the challenges identified by these groups. Approaches for outreach include seminars, workshops, bilateral discussions and online channels.<sup>87</sup>

# Utilizing International Human Rights Mechanisms

## What is it?

There are a range of international human rights mechanisms that can be used to promote accountability for the SDGs including the human rights treaty bodies, Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Human Rights Council's (HRC) Special Procedures and others.

The human rights treaty bodies<sup>88</sup> are committees of independent experts that monitor the implementation of the core human rights treaties by State parties. They review reports submitted periodically by State parties on the steps taken to implement the treaty as well as information submitted by other stakeholders, including civil society.<sup>89</sup> Based on the information received and dialogue with the State delegation at a dedicated session, a committee issues “concluding observations” or recommendations to the relevant State on its implementation of the treaty. Some committees can also receive and consider individual complaints, while others can conduct inquiries.<sup>90</sup>

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a cooperative peer review mechanism under the HRC, which reviews the human rights performance of all UN Member States during a four-year cycle. Reviews are based on three

main sources of information, as well as opportunities for interventions: a national report prepared by the State under review; a compilation of UN information prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and a summary of stakeholders' submissions – including from NGOs – prepared by the OHCHR. During subsequent reviews, the State is expected to report on implementation of the recommendations received during earlier reviews.<sup>91</sup>

The Special Procedures of the HRC are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. Some mandates address particular groups such as Indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities, while others address specific issues such as education, the environment and violence against women. As of August 2017, there were 44 thematic and 12 country-specific mandates, all of which relate to aspects of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>92</sup>

## Why is it important?

International human rights mechanisms are important in promoting accountability for the 2030 Agenda given

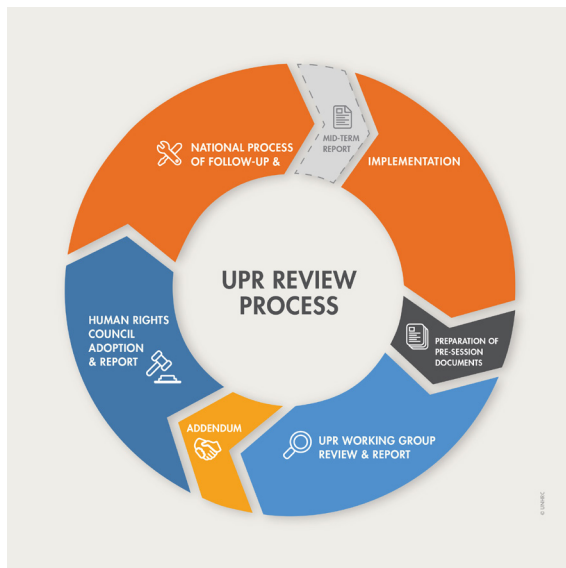
88 There are ten such treaty bodies, including the Human Rights Committee, Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Committee against Torture (CAT), Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW), Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) and Subcommittee on prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT).

89 In addition to the State party's report, human rights treaty bodies may receive information on the implementation of treaty provisions from United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), as well as from civil society, particularly NGOs (both national and international), professional associations and academic institutions. See: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2008). Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme: A Handbook for Civil Society. United Nations: New York and Geneva, p. 40. [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/CivilSociety/Documents/Handbook\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/CivilSociety/Documents/Handbook_en.pdf)

90 OHCHR (2008). Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme, p. 31; The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2016). Human Rights in Follow-up and Review, p. 44. Under certain conditions, six of the Committees (CCPR, CERD, CAT, CEDAW, CRPD, and CED) can receive complaints from individuals.

91 DIHR (2016). Human Rights in Follow-up and Review, pp. 42-43.

92 DIHR (2016). Human Rights in Follow-up and Review, p. 45; DIHR (2017). Human Rights and Data, p. 48.



93

the significant overlap between the SDGs and human rights standards. More than 90 per cent of the 169 SDG targets reflect core international human rights standards.<sup>94</sup> Further, unlike the SDGs, these international standards are legally binding.

Given that States are already subject to reporting obligations, existing human rights mechanisms can be used to raise human rights issues in the context of the SDGs. In reviewing countries, monitoring bodies can comment on and make recommendations to further SDG implementation including in relation to the discrimination or exclusion of specific groups, gaps in policy and legal frameworks, and the generation, allocation and use of resources necessary for the fulfilment of human rights that coincide with the SDGs.<sup>95</sup> Importantly, monitoring bodies can assess progress on the SDGs that overlap with human rights, as well as whether plans, processes and outcomes of SDG implementation respect, protect and fulfil human rights.<sup>96</sup>

The wealth of analysis, data, information and recommendations produced by existing human rights and labour mechanisms can also be used to inform SDG-specific accountability processes and reports including

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). In line with the 2030 Agenda, which states that “data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible,”<sup>97</sup> States and other actors – including civil society – can use existing human rights information to measure and assess implementation and progress towards achieving the SDGs for specific countries, topics or vulnerable groups.


## How can it be used?

CSOs may use international human rights standards to promote accountability for the 2030 Agenda in the following ways:

### 1. Engage with human rights mechanisms and forums to raise SDG-related issues – CSOs can participate in human rights reporting processes in order to bring attention to SDG issues that overlap with human rights and labour standards. In particular, CSOs should:

**a. Determine which mechanism to engage with** by analysing the links between the SDGs and a country’s human rights and labour standards. CSOs can use the Human Rights Guide to the SDGs, the UPR-SDG Data Explorer and/or the Universal Human Rights Index to identify links between human rights and labour standards with the SDGs;

**a. Determine which mechanism to engage with** by analysing the links between the SDGs and a country’s human rights and labour standards. CSOs can use the Human Rights Guide to the SDGs, the UPR-SDG Data Explorer and/or the Universal Human Rights Index to identify links between human rights and labour standards with the SDGs;

 **TIP:** Confirm that your country has ratified the relevant human rights instrument and, if so, identify the extent of any reservations made in relation to its provisions.<sup>98</sup>

**b. Familiarize yourself with the specific rules, modalities and timelines for civil society interaction** with the human rights body(s) or process with which you wish to engage. The OHCHR has a Handbook for Civil Society that provides a useful overview.

**c. Participate in consultations held by governments to**

93 OHCHR/UNHRC

94 DIHR (2018). Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda, p. 4.

95 DIHR (2018). Human Rights and Accountability in the 2030 and 2063 Agendas, p. 33. [https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/human\\_rights\\_and\\_accountability\\_in\\_the\\_2030\\_and\\_2063\\_agendas.pdf](https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/human_rights_and_accountability_in_the_2030_and_2063_agendas.pdf)

96 CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 22.

97 United Nations (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 48.

98 See the OHCHR’s status of ratification and the ILO’s ratifications by country.

prepare their national report on the human rights situation in their country and/or consultations held by independent human rights experts under the Special Procedures of the HRC;

**d. Prepare written submissions on the human rights situation in the country in relation to the SDGs** for consideration by human rights bodies. Many of the human rights treaty bodies accept written information, materials and reports from civil society, while the UPR process accepts written submissions from stakeholders for potential inclusion in a summary of stakeholders' submissions prepared by the OHCHR.

**e. Produce civil society shadow reports on the human rights situation in relation to the SDGs.** [For information on drafting reports, see chapter on civil society reporting.]

**f. Participate in human rights review sessions as observers and/or through oral submissions.** Depending on the rules of the human rights body, CSOs may be able to attend reviews and/or offer oral submissions or brief general comments on the SDGs at review sessions or pre-sessional working groups held by human rights bodies.<sup>99</sup>

**g. Follow-up on the outcomes of reviews** by engaging with governments to help them meet their joint human rights and SDG obligations. The outcomes of human

rights reviews can be a basis for dialogue with governments to further the implementation of the SDGs and human rights standards. Concluding observations or recommendations can also be used to raise awareness about the government's SDG and human rights obligations among civil society and citizens. [See chapter on awareness-raising.]

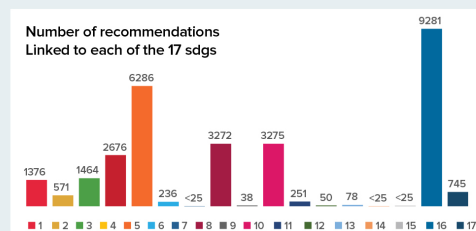
**2. Use information from human rights reporting mechanisms to inform SDG reviews** – CSOs can also use information, reports and recommendations from human rights and labour mechanisms to inform SDG-specific accountability processes such as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Notably, the *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews* encourages countries to draw on existing human rights reports when drafting their VNR report.<sup>100</sup>

The Danish Institute for Human Rights provides a helpful step-by-step guide on how to use human rights reporting in VNRs that may also be useful to CSOs wishing to use human rights information to inform SDG review processes at national and/or subnational levels.

You can find a step-by-step guide and other resources to help examine the interlinkages between human rights and the SDGs through DIHR's "Human Rights Guide to the SDGs" here: <http://sdg.humanrights.dk>

**LINKING THE UPR TO THE SDG**

Over the two cycles of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), more than 50,000 recommendations have been issued by states. Using an innovative and experimental data mining procedure, the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) has so far been possible to link more than 50% of these to specific SDG targets. The below chart illustrates how recommendations are linked across the 17 Goals.



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99 OHCHR (2008). Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme, p. 52.

100 UN DSD and UN DESA (2018). Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, pp. 11-12.

101 DIHR. HR/2030, p. 26.

## Key Resources:

- **The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs**, by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, is an online database – available in 7 languages – that allows users to identify the links between SDGs and international and regional human rights instruments, labour standards and key environmental instruments. See: <http://sdg.humanrights.dk>
- **The UPR-SDG Data Explorer**, by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, is an online database that allows users to explore how UPR recommendations for specific countries, regions or groups of rights-holders are linked to the SDGs. See: <http://upr.humanrights.dk>
- **OHCHR's Universal Human Rights Index** – available in the 6 official languages of the UN – allows searches of Observations and Recommendations of all UN treaty bodies, Special Procedures and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The index is searchable in relation to key rights or groups of rights, countries and regions, as well as specific types of populations or population groups. See: <http://uhri.ohchr.org/en>
- The **OHCHR's website** provides information and documentation relating to a range of human rights bodies including the treaty-based bodies and charter-based bodies that oversee mechanisms such as the UPR. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/>
- **Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme: A Handbook for Civil Society** (2008), by the OHCHR is a practical guide on how civil society can engage with and contribute to UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. See: <http://www.ohchr.org/civilsocietyhandbook/>
- **NORMLEX**, the ILO's Information System on International Labour Standards, provides all comments and recommendations of the CEACR. See: [www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/)
- The **OHCHR's Civil Society Unit** is dedicated to strengthening engagement between civil society and the UN human rights programme and provides information on a broad range of issues. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/>
- **UPR Info** is a Geneva-based NGO that aims to raise awareness of the UPR and supports the effective and meaningful participation of civil society in the UPR process. See: <https://www.upr-info.org/en>

## Case Study: Providing Input into International Monitoring Processes to Advocate for National Reforms

**Rwanda:** Despite constitutional guarantees for the right to freedom of speech and the media in Rwanda, there remain gaps in legislation and policy to protect these rights. As part of its response to this problem, the Human Rights First Rwanda Association (HRFRA) engaged with the Ministry of Justice to provide input into Rwanda's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report, drawing attention to the challenges of access to information, freedom of expression and access to justice. HRFRA was active in identifying which ministry was responsible for the UPR process and engaging with the unit responsible for putting together the report. Using evidence-based research, HRFRA provided technical inputs to the report. HRFRA undertook its own legal analysis of existing legislation on media freedom and access to information and incorporated relevant report findings from bodies such as the Rwanda Media Commission. As a result of HRFRA's lobbying, one of the key recommendations from the HRC following the 2011 UPR process called for better protections of the rights to freedom of expression, the media and access to information. HRFRA used this as the basis for their advocacy, engaging in open dialogue with the government on how to take this recommendation forward. Subsequently, Parliament passed Law N°02/2013, which removed certain restrictions on the press in Rwanda, and Law N°04/2013, which gave every person the right to information in the possession of public, and some private, bodies. Subsequently, HRFRA, in partnership with Africa Freedom of Information Network, provided input into the second UPR process, producing a parallel report for Rwanda in 2015 that updated the HRC on progress on freedom of expression and information, as well as highlighted ongoing challenges with implementation.<sup>102</sup>

# Promoting Inclusive Government Consultations

## What is it?

Public consultation is a formal process through which citizens and stakeholders give their feedback and views on policies, plans, proposals, laws and other options presented by the government. It can take place at various stages of policy development, from exploring ideas set out in proposals or policy papers through to reviewing drafts of legislation or reports.<sup>103</sup> Although public consultation typically involves citizens and stakeholders responding to something presented to them by the government, in the case of the SDGs, it should also involve regular dialogue between decision-makers, citizens and other stakeholders on progress, challenges, gaps and next steps in implementing, monitoring and reviewing the SDGs. There are a range of techniques and methods to consult citizens and stakeholders, including face-to-face workshops, online platforms, written comments, focus groups, citizens' juries, public meetings, user panels and crowdsourcing comments on proposed policies or legislation.<sup>104</sup>

## Why is it important?

Inclusive, regular and meaningful consultation between national governments and stakeholders – including civil society – is essential for SDG implementation and accountability. Consultation provides opportunities for diverse voices to be heard on issues that matter to citi-

zens, allowing people to share their knowledge, insight and experience to advance SDG implementation. It can offer new perspectives, information and ideas on implementing the SDGs that result in policies and services that are better designed, more practical and relevant, and more efficiently and effectively delivered. Consultation can also strengthen the legitimacy of decision-making and build national ownership of the SDGs by enabling people to identify priorities and share in decision-making, thereby assuming greater ownership of solutions and responsibility for achieving the SDGs.<sup>105</sup> Notably, “a transparent consultation mechanism subject to democratic pressure or public opinion can often play a more significant role in enforcing institutional agreements, especially in human rights, than any outside judicial authority.”<sup>106</sup>

## How can it be used?

There are a number of ways for CSOs and citizens to engage in public consultation processes and to influence or improve consultations by governments, including the following:

- 1. Determine whether there is an existing consultation mechanism** – As a starting point, CSOs should investigate whether there is an established mechanism for dialogue and consultation with citizens and other stakeholders on the 2030 Agenda. Where no mecha-

<sup>103</sup> The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 77.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>105</sup> United Nations Development Group (UNDG) (2017). Guidelines to Support Country Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals, p. 34. <https://undg.org/document/guidelines-to-support-country-reporting-on-the-sustainable-development-goals/>; The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 73-74.

<sup>106</sup> UN DESA (2015). CDP Background Paper, p. 6.



## Conditions for good public consultations

While consultations may vary depending upon the national or cultural context, there are a number of essential conditions for a good consultation. It is important that consultations are well designed, properly resourced, and based on a genuine desire to involve citizens and stakeholders and take their views into account.<sup>107</sup> The input of citizens and stakeholders must be able to influence the government's proposal, plan, policy or report on the SDGs and not be a tokenistic exercise of civic engagement. Consultations should seek to reach a range of different relevant stakeholders – including vulnerable and marginalized groups – and be conducted in an open, transparent, inclusive and participatory manner. Steps should be taken to ensure that existing power relations – based on gender, age, ethnicity, social status or other characteristic or dynamic – do not unduly influence the process to conduct a meaningful consultation on the implementation or review of the 2030 Agenda. Further, the outcome of consultations should be shared widely with clear plans as to how the results will influence or contribute to SDG implementation or review. Ensuring meaningful consultations with citizens and stakeholders may require a change in culture in how governments interact and cooperate with the public, as well as dedicated mechanisms that take into account the voices of people across a range of public institutions and organizations.<sup>108</sup>

nism exists, CSOs should advocate for the institutionalization of public consultation across government bodies in relation to the SDGs. In particular, CSOs may wish to:

**a. Urge the government to establish legislation or guidelines on public consultation** in relation to the implementation and review of the SDGs. Such legislation should establish basic minimum criteria for consultation and acknowledge that formal consultation is just one element of citizen engagement in decision-making.<sup>109</sup>

**b. Encourage the government to develop a stakeholder engagement plan** that identifies key stakeholders and methods of engagement such as public consultations.<sup>110</sup> This plan should outline the strategy for national consultations in relation to the SDGs including stakeholder participation in policy development and national review processes.

**c. Promote the use of multi-stakeholder bodies or forums to engage in public consultation processes** on the SDGs, especially civil society bodies that represent vulnerable or marginalized groups. Such bodies and forums can become mechanisms for ongoing national dialogue on the implementation and review of the SDGs.<sup>111</sup>

**d. Encourage the government to convene a consultative forum** for dialogue on SDG implementation and review, if formal bodies or forums do not already exist.<sup>112</sup> Such forums may address the SDGs generally and/or focus on specific SDG targets or issues that require a deeper and more focused discussion with citizens and other stakeholders.



**TIP:** “We would say that it is critical to push for and constructively use any civil society space in government processes.” – Gomer Padong, Philippine Social Enterprise Network<sup>113</sup>

<sup>107</sup> The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 61.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>109</sup> The Open Government Partnership (2014), pp. 77-78.

<sup>110</sup> United Nations Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) and UN DESA (2018), Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, p. 11. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17354VNR\\_handbook\\_2018.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17354VNR_handbook_2018.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> UNDG (2017). Guidelines, p. 36.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>113</sup> Cited in: Together 2030 (2016). Experiences from national voices, p. 12.

**2. Urge the government to hold public consultations regularly** – CSOs should urge the government to hold consultations on the SDGs at regular intervals, especially in relation to national and subnational review processes. Although the 2030 Agenda does not specify a frequency for national or subnational reviews of the SDGs, “more frequent reviews... will support stronger national engagement”<sup>114</sup> and promote greater accountability to citizens.

*“We also encourage member states to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels... [that] draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders...”* – 2030 Agenda, paragraph 79.

**3. Raise awareness of consultations** – CSOs should raise awareness of public consultations on the SDGs among civil society, citizens, the media and others, and urge the government to publicize consultation opportunities widely and with appropriate lead time. Particular effort should be made to raise awareness of the different ways in which stakeholders – including vulnerable and marginalized groups – can participate in and contribute to consultations.

**4. Ensure consultations are inclusive and engage vulnerable and marginalized groups** – CSOs should urge governments to make consultations inclusive and accessible to a wide variety of stakeholders, especially groups that are traditionally marginalized or excluded. Consultations should use a range of inclusive and accessible approaches – including both online and offline methods – and be conducted in local languages or language that is accessible to participants.<sup>115</sup> CSOs can play an important role in advocating for groups – including other CSOs – that may be excluded from public consultations or are unable to participate without additional support including financial support. For example, children and young people are a special group who require access to child-friendly, age-appropriate and safe mechanisms and spaces to engage in public consultations with decision-makers.

**5. Promote transparency and make information publicly available during and after consultations** – CSOs should urge the government to make submissions and records of consultations on the SDGs publicly available and accessible so that citizens and other stakeholders can track the influences that may shape policies and decisions on SDG implementation and/or review processes.<sup>116</sup> CSOs may wish to encourage governments to develop a portal for all active and complete consultations where citizens and stakeholders can respond to and track issues.<sup>117</sup> Where governments are unwilling or unable to make inputs to consultations on the SDGs publicly available, CSOs should seek to publish their own contributions to consultations via their website or other means such as a newsletter.

**6. Publicize the outcome of consultations** – CSOs should urge governments to publish the outcome of consultations and report back to participants on how their inputs have been taken into consideration. Such reports should outline who attended the consultation, how it was conducted and documented, and what, if any, decisions were taken as a result of the consultation. CSOs can also publish their own account of participating in consultations on the SDGs – including through newsletters, blogs and social media – including whether processes were conducted in a meaningful, accessible, inclusive and participatory manner.



**TIP:** Where governments are unwilling or unable to hold consultations on SDG review or implementation, CSOs may hold their own independent consultations and publicize the results among government, citizens and other stakeholders. In such circumstances, CSOs should strive to meet all of the conditions for good public consultations.

114 United Nations (2016). Report of the Secretary General, Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level. A/70/684, para. 75. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/684&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/684&Lang=E)

115 CCIC (2018), p. 28.

116 UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 32-33.

117 The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 78.

## Key Resources:

- **Experiences from national voices: Civil society engagement on national reviews of the 2030 Agenda (2016)**, by Together 2030. See: <http://www.together2030.org>
- The **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)** is an international association of members who seek to promote and improve the practice of public engagement. See: <http://www.iap2.org>

### Use of digital tools for consultation

With rapid advances in the use of information and communication technology, online public consultations are increasingly becoming a popular method of engaging with citizens. Digital tools – such as social media and other web-based platforms – provide decision-makers with the means to communicate directly with citizens in real time. Similarly, CSOs may use digital tools to engage with and ask questions of decision-makers, provide feedback on government services and comment on the policies and decisions of governments.<sup>118</sup> Digital tools that facilitate dialogue and consultation between governments and citizens can thus be used as a two-way street to promote accountability for the SDGs. Digital tools should ideally be used in combination with other methods for public consultation so as not to exclude segments of the population that do not have access to or are unable to use the internet.

### Case Study: Principles of Ownership and Participation for the 2030 Agenda

**Africa:** *Implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda in Africa has largely benefited from a legacy of formulating development plans that have demanded broad consultations with different stakeholders. In 30 countries, consultations took place under the aegis of governments, UN country teams and key actors in civil society, including women and youth groups, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, academia and the private sector. Close to 350,000 stakeholders were consulted at the subnational and national levels. Methods applied included face-to-face meetings, focus group discussions, stakeholder interviews, radio phone-in programmes, television panel interviews, and expert group meetings. Several countries used online and off-line surveys, including MY World surveys, and text messaging, which resulted in feedback from 17,000 young people in Uganda.*<sup>119</sup>

**Jordan:** *Ahead of its 2017 VNR, Jordan's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, the departmental focal point for 2030 Agenda implementation, prepared a stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure the widest participation from all non-state actors in implementation and the VNR. The strategy proposed a variety of consultation mechanisms including taskforce meetings, workshops, focus groups and debates. It also included several outreach tools like printed materials and social media engagement to ensure broad engagement on the 2030 Agenda. The strategy took into consideration the challenges to meaningful participation faced by non-state actors, namely: difficulties reaching the most marginalized, the tendency to involve larger non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rather than smaller, community-based organizations and individuals, and time constraints.*<sup>120</sup>

118 The Open Government Partnership (2014). p. 67.

119 Guidelines, p. 36-37.

120 CCC (2018). p. 24, case study.

# Pursuing Law Reforms, Strategic Litigation and Legal Empowerment

## What is it?

Law reform or legal reform is the process of analysing current laws and advocating and carrying out changes in a legal system, usually with the aim of enhancing justice or efficiency. There are four main methods of reforming the law: (a) repeal (removal or reversal of a law), (b) creation of new law, (c) consolidation (combination of a number of laws into one) and (d) codification (collection and systematic arrangement, usually by subject, of the laws of a state or country).<sup>121</sup>

Litigation means taking a case to court. Strategic litigation refers to public interest litigation that seeks to bring about a significant change in the law – e.g. clarifying, amending or extending the law in support of an overarching law reform objective – by taking an individual case to court.<sup>122</sup> The people involved in strategic litigation cases are typically the victims of human rights violations – by the government or other powerful actors – that are also experienced by other people. Thus, strategic litigation often focuses on an individual case in order to bring about a systemic change for a much larger group of people.

Legal empowerment enables people to know, use and shape the law. It starts from a grassroots orientation, as opposed to the top-down approaches of law reform and litigation. Legal empowerment is about strengthening the capacity of all people to exercise their rights – either

as individuals or as members of a community – and ensuring that the law is available and meaningful to citizens. Building community power is central to legal empowerment.

## Why is it important?

Despite the voluntary nature of the 2030 Agenda, both law reform and strategic litigation may be used to promote accountability for the SDGs. Law reform is essential for achieving a number of specific targets under the SDGs<sup>123</sup> as well as to ensure there is overall consistency between a country's national laws and the SDGs. Law reform may also be used to further accountability for the 2030 Agenda by ensuring that there is an enabling legal framework and environment for people to hold their governments accountable for SDG progress. For example, law reform may be used to ensure that civil society can provide input into public policy decision-making or that they have adequate access to judicial and other mechanisms to hold governments accountable.

Strategic litigation may also be used to review the soundness, legality and constitutionality of public policies, laws and official conduct as they relate to SDG implementation.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, strategic litigation can be used to hold a government accountable for the implementation – or lack thereof – of laws themselves. In particular, litigation may be used where there is over-

121 Legal and Economic Empowerment Global Network (LEEG-net). SDG-enabling Law Reform Drive. <https://www.leeg-net.org/sdgs-enabling-law-reform-drive>

122 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 31.

123 See for example: Targets 5.1, 5.a, 10.3 and 10.5.

124 CESR and OHCHR (2013). p. 37.

lap between the provisions of the SDGs with the human rights and/or constitutional provisions of a country. For example, civil society may challenge and seek to improve access to basic services for vulnerable groups (SDG target 1.4) where the right of such access is provided for by the country's constitution or by international human rights treaties to which the country is a party. Where the government's actions undermine access to basic services or disproportionately harm particular individuals or groups, strategic litigation may result in the government's having to justify its actions, take a certain course of action or establish an oversight mechanism that furthers accountability.<sup>125</sup>

In addition to law reform and strategic litigation, legal empowerment is also important in ensuring accountability for the SDGs. Legal empowerment is about strengthening the capacity of all people to exercise their rights – either as individuals or as members of a community – and ensuring that the law is available and meaningful to citizens. Approaches to legal empowerment may include legal education, information, advocacy, organizing and/or mediation. It is often promoted by a large frontline community of paralegals who are trained in law to assist citizens in finding concrete solutions to instances of injustice. Legal empowerment approaches engage the grassroots level, especially important for SDG implementation, follow-up and review at national and subnational levels. In turn, this can lead to more integrated and systematic approaches to SDG implementation.

## How can it be used?

CSOs seeking to use **law reform** to promote accountability for the SDGs should consider engaging in the following actions:

**1. Compare SDG targets with existing laws to identify any inconsistencies or gaps** – It is critical for CSOs wishing to engage in law reform to undertake an initial gap analysis of existing laws and the SDGs in order to assess key areas for law reform. This analysis can then

help inform decisions about which law reforms to prioritize.<sup>126</sup>

**2. Raise awareness about existing laws and rights in relation to the SDGs** – CSOs should raise awareness of existing laws and/or rights among citizens, including how laws may positively or negatively impact the achievement of the SDGs. By raising awareness, CSOs are more likely to be successful in garnering support for law reform proposals. Awareness-raising can target general members of the population as well as those in positions of power, such as members of the government and the judiciary. CSOs may also wish to engage various stakeholders – such as paralegals – to help people understand the law and their rights.



**TIP:** Anti-discrimination acts, bill of rights and constitutional protections for certain groups are particularly important types of laws which all citizens should be aware of and which can be used as a basis to challenge and reform discriminatory laws.

**3. Engage with relevant ministries and legislators** – The most common avenue for pursuing law reform is through working with the relevant ministries within the executive branch of government responsible for proposing law reforms. In many countries, it is also possible for legislators to propose new laws or amendments.<sup>127</sup> To engage, CSOs should:

- As a starting point, determine how the law-making process works and which body in government or legislative body is responsible for actually drafting laws.<sup>128</sup>
- Educate and lobby key ministers, legislators and/or government officials on the issue for law reform.<sup>129</sup>
- Offer technical advice or support to the ministry, legislator or office responsible for legislative drafting to develop a proposal for law reform. Such support may include providing a draft law or model laws from other jurisdictions for consideration.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> CESR and OHCHR (2013), p. 39-40.

<sup>126</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 26.

<sup>128</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, pp. 26-27.

<sup>129</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 27.

<sup>130</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 27.



**TIP:** CSOs without technical capacity to advise on law reform may wish to seek pro bono legal assistance and advice from volunteers (e.g. law students or professors), private law firms and/or international NGOs that offer free law-reform advice.<sup>131</sup>



**TIP:** CSOs should seek to ensure that there are opportunities for citizens to participate in law reform, especially for those populations affected by the law.

- Offer practical support to the ministry, legislator or office responsible for legislative drafting to undertake or facilitate public consultations to inform the draft law.<sup>132</sup>
- Once a draft law is tabled for consideration, participate in any public hearings on the law by making oral or written submissions to legislative committees.<sup>133</sup>

Where law reform is unsuccessful or existing laws align with the SDGs but are not being implemented effectively, CSOs may seek to use **strategic litigation** to promote accountability for the SDGs. CSOs seeking to use litigation should consider engaging in the following actions:

**1. Assess whether a particular SDG target is protected under the country's constitutional, human rights or other law** – Although the SDGs are not legally binding, it may be possible to make claims within national judicial mechanisms to hold governments accountable, where SDG commitments overlap with existing legal or constitutional guarantees.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, it may be possible to pursue national litigation for the SDGs where a country has ratified an international human rights treaty that overlaps with the provisions of the SDGs.

**2. Determine whether the government's actions or failure to act constitute a violation of the law** – CSOs should assess whether the government's actions have violated an existing law or right in relation to the SDGs. In some cases, litigation may be pursued where a new or amended law is not being properly implemented or where the government is slow to dedicate resources to implementation.<sup>135</sup> In many cases, it will be open to interpretation as to whether the government is violating the law, which may be resolved through litigation by the courts clarifying and providing guidance as to how the law should be interpreted.

**3. Establish whether you have the right to pursue litigation against the government** – In some cases, CSOs, individuals or groups may not have “standing” or

## Obstacles to the judicial enforcement of the SDGs

While the judicial enforcement of human rights covered by the SDGs can result in furthering accountability for the SDGs, pursuing strategic litigation for such rights is not without its challenges. Cases may not be able to be taken to court because certain rights are not legally recognized, or the court lacks the power or capacity to resolve complex issues. In many cases, it may be too costly for the people most affected – especially those living in poverty – to pursue litigation. Furthermore, in countries where the legal system is corrupt, subject to government influence, or virtually non-existent, litigation may simply not be a realistic or viable option for those seeking accountability for the SDGs.<sup>136</sup>

131 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 28.

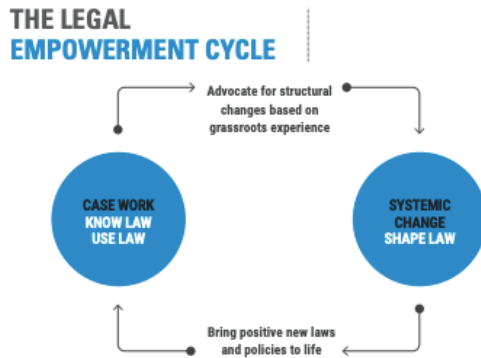
132 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 27.

133 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 31.

134 Donald, K. and Way, S. (2016). Accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals: A Lost Opportunity? Ethics & International Affairs, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 201–213. <https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/2016/accountability-sustainable-development-goals-lost-opportunity/>

135 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 32.

136 CESR and OHCHR (2013). p. 40-41.



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the right to pursue litigation against the government unless they can demonstrate direct harm, harm to

others who are unable to pursue litigation, or they have been granted “standing” under the law.

**4. Seek professional legal assistance and support –** Strategic litigation is costly, time-consuming and often requires the assistance of legal professionals who are trained to conduct litigation. Accordingly, CSOs should try to identify sources of pro bono or free legal advice or have lawyers as members of their civil society coalition.<sup>138</sup> There are some legal groups who are sometimes willing to provide free advice such as the American Bar Association (ABA) or the International Development and Law Organisation (IDLO).<sup>139</sup>



**TIP:** CSOs should consider the costs, timelines and challenges of strategic litigation, and may wish to pursue strategic litigation only as an option of last resort in relation to SDG accountability.

## Key Resources:

- **Advocacy: Justice and SDGs (2016)**, by the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network is a useful toolkit for civil society, activists and policy practitioners who are working to promote legal empowerment and access to justice in relation to the SDGs. See: <http://tapnetwork2030.org/accesstojustice/>
- **The SDGs-enabling Law Reform Drive** is a global initiative launched by a consortium of international law firms that seek to help developing countries undertake law reforms aimed at enabling effective implementation of the SDGs through their national action plans. See: <https://www.leeg-net.org/sdgs-enabling-law-reform-drive>
- **Namati** is a global organization dedicated to putting the power of the law in the hands of the people. It facilitates a Global Legal Empowerment Network that brings together 1,500+ organizations and 6,000+ individuals dedicated to grassroots justice. See: <https://namati.org/network/>

137 TAP Network (2015). Advocacy: Justice and the SDGs. [http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TAP\\_Advocacy\\_JusticeandtheSDGs.pdf](http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TAP_Advocacy_JusticeandtheSDGs.pdf)

138 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 32.

139 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 32.

### **Case Study: Improving the Availability of Antiretroviral Medicines: *Treatment Action Campaign v. Minister of Health***

**South Africa:** South Africa has more people living with HIV than any other country in the world, affecting around 18 per cent of its population. In 2001, the HIV prevalence rate for pregnant women was an estimated 24.5 per cent, and the number of infants born with the virus totalled about 70,000 a year. Treatment Action Campaign, an AIDS activism CSO, brought a case against the South African Government before the Constitutional Court for the failure to provide access to medicine designed to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus during labour. In 2000, the Government announced a programme to introduce the antiretroviral drug Nevirapine in a limited number of pilot projects. Nevirapine can reduce transmission of HIV from mother to child considerably. Treatment Action Campaign, however, argued that these restrictions resulted in unnecessary infections and deaths and were in violation of sections 27 and 28 of the South African Constitution. The Court ruled that the Government must ensure access to the drug for all pregnant women living with HIV and that restrictions of the drug for research purposes denied access to those who could be reasonably included. The judgement is estimated to have saved tens of thousands of lives and served as a significant advance towards the right to access to essential and life-saving medicines. Treatment Action Campaign's successful claim further served as a catalyst to mobilize efforts around the world for the provision of antiretroviral therapy in developing countries so crucial for progress on SDG 3.<sup>140</sup>

### **Case Study: Stakeholder Participation in Determining the Role of a National Caucus in Realizing the SDGs**

**Kenya:** In Kenya, the Parliamentary Caucus on Sustainable Development Goals and Business encouraged the participation of a wide range of actors in developing a strategic plan on the role of the caucus in realizing the SDGs in the country. Through a Stakeholders Workshop and Validation Meeting, the caucus and supporting consultants brought together actors working on SDG implementation and socially responsible business in order to gather feedback and recommendations on the strategic plan. At the Stakeholders Workshop, Namati participated alongside representatives from civil society, corporate social responsibility departments, and other business entities to highlight key priorities and actions the caucus could take to promote progress under various SDGs in Kenya. For example, under SDG 16 it was suggested that a budgetary allocation and other actions by the caucus members could help implement the existing Legal Aid Act and promote access to justice. After incorporation of the workshop outcomes into a feasible strategic plan, the draft was featured at the Validation Meeting for review, discussion and final input. In this way, the caucus has built a plan and established relationships with non-governmental actors that can facilitate further support and collaboration on the SDGs in the country.<sup>141</sup>

140 CESR. Who will?, p. 40.

141 Namati (2018). Case study.





# Working on Oversight for Accountability



# Engaging with National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI)

## What is it?

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are independent state bodies with a constitutional or legislative mandate to protect and promote human rights. NHRIs include human rights commissions, human rights institutes, ombudspersons and *defensorías*. While the specific mandate of NHRIs may vary from country to country, the general functions of NHRIs in relation to human rights typically include: research and advice; education and promotion; monitoring and reporting; investigation; conciliation and remedies; cooperation with national and international organizations; and interaction with the judiciary.<sup>142</sup>

According to the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), “A key role of NHRIs is to monitor and measure the national human rights situation against international human rights standards. NHRIs often prepare annual status reports on the general human rights situation as well as analysis and research on specific human rights topics. Many NHRIs have a strong focus on discrimination and inequalities and monitor the situation of vulnerable and marginalised groups and particular rights-holders. Internationally, NHRIs prepare “shadow reports” for the Human Rights Council’s (HRC) Universal

Periodic Review (UPR) and treaty bodies.”<sup>143</sup> As of 21 February 2018, there were 120 NHRIs accredited by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).<sup>144</sup>

## Why is it important?

Given the explicit linkages between human rights and the SDGs outlined in the 2030 Agenda,<sup>145</sup> NHRIs can play an important role in promoting accountability for the 2030 Agenda by using their existing mandate. The 2015 *Mérida Declaration on the Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*<sup>146</sup> – adopted by the International Coordinating Committee of NHRIs, now GANHRI – outlines the functions and activities that NHRIs can undertake in order to contribute to a human-rights based approach to the 2030 Agenda. The *Mérida Declaration* recognizes NHRIs as “uniquely placed to play a bridging role between stakeholders and promote transparent, participatory, and inclusive national processes of implementation and monitoring” of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>147</sup>

In particular, the *Mérida Declaration* emphasizes that NHRIs are in a position to:

<sup>142</sup> The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2016). *Human Rights in Follow-up and Review* p. 38.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>144</sup> Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) (2018). [https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Documents/Status%20Accreditation%20Chart%20\(21%20February%202018\).pdf](https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Documents/Status%20Accreditation%20Chart%20(21%20February%202018).pdf)

<sup>145</sup> According to DIHR, more than 90 per cent of the 169 SDG targets reflect core international human rights and labour standards. See: Danish Institute for Human Rights (2018). *Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Lessons Learned and Next Steps*, p. 4. [https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/sdg/hr\\_and\\_2030\\_agenda-web\\_2018.pdf](https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/sdg/hr_and_2030_agenda-web_2018.pdf)

<sup>146</sup> The Mérida Declaration: The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). <https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/ICC/InternationalConference/12IC/Background%20Information/Merida%20Declaration%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>147</sup> The Mérida Declaration (2015), para. 15.

- Provide advice to national and local governments, rights-holders and others, to promote a human-rights based approach to implementing and measuring the 2030 Agenda, including by assessing the impact of laws, policies, programmes, national development plans, administrative practices and budgets;
- Promote transparent and inclusive processes for participation and consultation with rights-holders and civil society at all stages of implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- Engage with all stakeholders to raise awareness, build trust and promote dialogue and concerted efforts for a human rights-based approach to SDG implementation and monitoring, and safeguard space for the engagement of rights-holders and civil society;
- Assist in shaping national indicators and data collection systems, including by building on existing international and regional human rights reporting and monitoring mechanisms;
- Monitor progress at all levels to identify inequality and discrimination, including through innovative and participatory approaches to data-collection and monitoring;
- Engage with, and hold governments to account for poor or uneven progress in implementation, including by reporting on SDG progress and obstacles to parliaments, the general public, and national, regional and international mechanisms;
- Respond to, conduct inquiries into, and investigate allegations of rights violations in the context of development and SDG implementation; and
- Facilitate access to justice, redress and remedy for those who experience abuse and violation of their rights in the process of development, including by receiving and processing complaints, where NHRIs have such functions.<sup>148</sup>

While NHRIs have the potential to promote accountability for the SDGs, some NHRIs may face constraints due to their restricted or limited mandates, lack of independence, limited technical capacity, and/or inadequate financial and human resources.<sup>149</sup> In response to these limitations, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in December 2015 underlining the importance of effective, independent and pluralistic NHRIs for sustainable development.<sup>150</sup> In addition, the global indicator selected to monitor SDG target 16.a in the 2030 Agenda is the “existence of independent National Human Rights Institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles,”<sup>151</sup> which are the international benchmarks against which NHRIs are accredited by GANHRI.

## How can it be used?

The Paris Principles explicitly mandate NHRIs to work closely with civil society, promoting cooperation and coordination to enhance the protection and promotion of human rights. In line with the *Mérida Declaration*, there are a number of ways that CSOs can engage with NHRIs to promote accountability for the 2030 Agenda, including the following:

**1. Determine whether the country has an accredited NHRI and review its status** – As a starting point, CSOs should determine whether there is an accredited NHRI and review its status in terms of compliance with the Paris Principles.<sup>152</sup> GANHRI classifies NHRIs as “A” (fully compliant), “B” (partially compliant) or “C” (non-compliant) with the Paris Principles.

### 2. Engage with NHRIs to:

**a. Secure or safeguard space for civil society** – As a prerequisite for accountability for the 2030 Agenda, NHRIs may be able to play a role in safeguarding space for civil society actors to engage in SDG implementation and review processes. Such a role will, of course, depend upon the NHRI’s independence and autonomy from the country’s government. CSOs concerned about a lack of safe space to engage with the SDGs should contact their

148 The Mérida Declaration (2015), para. 17.

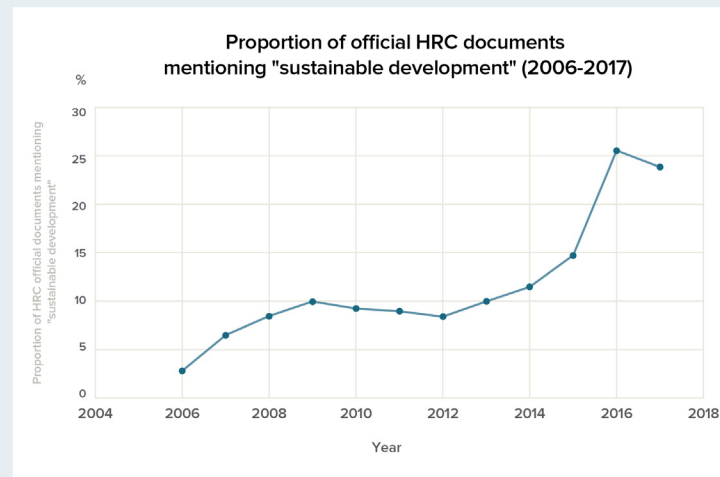
149 UN Women (2018), p. 41; CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 14.

150 DIHR (2017), Human Rights and Data, p. 52. <https://www.humanrights.dk/publications/human-rights-data>.

151 *Ibid*

152 The Paris Principles set out the following six main criteria that NHRIs are required to meet: 1. Mandate and competence: a broad mandate, based on universal human rights norms and standards; 2. Autonomy from Government; 3. Independence guaranteed by statute or Constitution; 4. Pluralism; 5. Adequate resources; and 6. Adequate powers of investigation. For more information, see: <https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/ParisPrinciples.aspx>

AS EVIDENT FROM THE FIGURE BELOW, THE FREQUENCY HAS GROWN SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS.



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respective NHRI to determine what kind of support, if any, can be provided.

**b. Raise awareness of the SDGs** – The *Mérida Declaration* recognizes the role of NHRIs in engaging with stakeholders to raise awareness of the implementation and review of the SDGs. Accordingly, CSOs should seek to determine what actions NHRIs are taking to raise awareness of the SDGs and explore potential partnerships with NHRIs. For example, while NHRIs may have greater resources to promote awareness of the SDGs, some CSOs may be in a better position to reach vulnerable or marginalized groups with awareness-raising messages or activities. [For more information on raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda, see chapter on awareness-raising.]

**c. Ensure transparent, inclusive and participatory national review processes** – NHRIs can play a critical role in ensuring that national review processes engage with citizens, including those who are the furthest behind. CSOs should urge NHRIs to act as an advisor and convener of national review processes and mechanisms

– including in relation to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) – and ensure that all processes are inclusive, participatory and engage marginalized groups and communities.

**d. Provide independent reports on a country's human rights situation in relation to the SDGs** – CSOs should urge NHRIs to use their mandate to report on the SDGs to both human rights bodies as well as at SDG-specific forums such as the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). NHRIs can provide information on the general human rights situation, unequal progress and the situation of those furthest behind, as well as information on procedural aspects of national consultations, including their transparency and stakeholder participation.<sup>154</sup>

**e. Promote participatory approaches to data-collection and monitoring the SDGs** – NHRIs can use their existing mandate to facilitate participatory data collection processes<sup>155</sup> in order to identify inequalities that might otherwise be overlooked by official government data sources. Accordingly, CSOs should consider partnering

153 The Danish Institute of Human Rights. HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2018). [https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/sdg/hr\\_and\\_2030\\_agenda-web\\_2018.pdf](https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/sdg/hr_and_2030_agenda-web_2018.pdf)

154 DIHR (2016). Human Rights in Follow-up and Review, p. 47.

155 DIHR (2017). Human Rights and Data, p. 8.

with NHRIs on third-party data initiatives that engage vulnerable or marginalized groups that may be excluded from traditional data collection and monitoring methods. [See chapter on data.]

**f. Conduct independent research and publish reports on SDG implementation** – CSOs should encourage NHRIs to conduct independent research and publish reports that document and assess the impact of laws, policies, programmes, national development plans and budgets in relation to SDG implementation, especially for vulnerable or marginalized groups.<sup>156</sup> Research and reports may be produced individually by NHRIs or jointly with CSOs in order to assess the contribution, or lack thereof, of governments as well as other development actors

engaged in implementing the 2030 Agenda.<sup>157</sup>

**g. Investigate and respond to individual human rights complaints and facilitate access to justice in the context of SDG implementation** – Some NHRIs may have the ability to investigate individual complaints or pursue legal action for human rights violations that occur in the context of SDG implementation. Where NHRIs have such functions, CSOs should consider bringing individual cases to the attention of NHRIs, in order to assist individual complainants as well as to potentially affect change for a wider group of people. [For more information on the use of strategic or public interest litigation in relation to the SDGs, see chapter on law reform and strategic litigation.]

## Key Resources:

- **National Human Rights Institutions engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2017)**, by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), is a study on how NHRIs support the implementation of the SDGs. See: [https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/News/Documents/GANHRI\\_NHRIs%20engaging%20with%20the%20SDGs.pdf](https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/News/Documents/GANHRI_NHRIs%20engaging%20with%20the%20SDGs.pdf)
- The **Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)** is the international association of NHRIs that seeks to promote and strengthen NHRIs and provides leadership in the promotion and protection of human rights. See: <https://nhri.ohchr.org/>
- The **Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI)** is a regional umbrella body that brings together 44 African NHRIs and works towards the establishment and strengthening of NHRIs in Africa. See: <https://www.nanhri.org>
- The **GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA)**, is a resource where CSOs can find their country's NHRI's status. See: <https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/GANHRIAccreditation/Pages/default.aspx>

## Case Study: National Preparation Process for the Universal Periodic Review

**Kenya:** In Kenya, the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) took up a key role in the process by offering a platform for stakeholders to exchange experiences and coordinate their positions on a weekly basis. At the same time, KNCHR maintained continuous engagement with relevant government institutions, which ensured that commitment to the UPR process on their part extended beyond the actual review at the HRC. KNCHR's strategies for the post-UPR phase included the development of milestones for recommendations, and awareness raising and advocacy on their implementation through translation into accessible and easily understandable formats that could be broadly disseminated.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>156</sup> CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 13.

<sup>157</sup> CESR and UN Women (2017), p. 14.

<sup>158</sup> DIHR (2011), Universal Periodic Review: First Cycle, p. 81-90, cited in: HRs in FUR, p. 42.

# Utilizing Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI)

## What is it?

Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) are independent national oversight bodies, largely responsible for auditing a government's revenue and spending, helping to ensure full transparency and accountability, and even the performance of government bodies and ministries in using public funds efficiently and effectively. Structures, mandates and reporting relationships of SAIs vary, and thus, these institutions can play different accountability roles in different countries. Many SAIs independently support parliaments in performing oversight of government budgets and spending. However, many of them are playing an even larger role in accountability – including some with judicial authority – to ensure that government programmes are in compliance with laws and regulations, or even undertaking performance assessments to determine the effectiveness of a government's activities.

## Why is it important?

As a key player in ensuring transparency and accountability of any government's budgets and programmes, SAIs can play a very important role in assessing progress on the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. SAIs can contribute in many ways. These include:

- Undertaking independent performance audits of a government's SDG implementation efforts;
- Providing checks on a government's budget allocation and expenditures;

- Ensuring compliance of a government's programmes with existing laws and regulations; and
- Assessing the readiness of a national government to implement the SDGs and a government's ability to report on the SDGs, including the reliability of its data production capabilities to support this reporting.

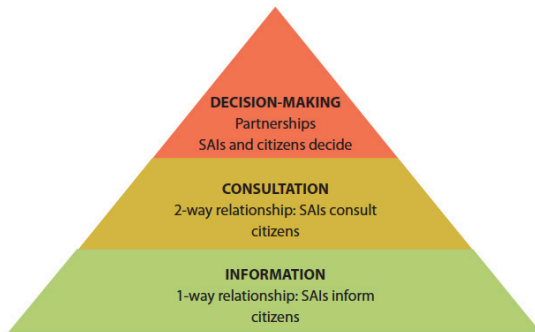
The existence and effectiveness of SAIs can also contribute directly to a country's implementation of SDG 16, particularly in regard to targets around fostering transparent, effective, inclusive and accountable government institutions.

## How can it be used?

Civil society can engage with SAIs in a variety of ways. Such engagement can require time to build trust between civil society, SAIs and governments, and safe spaces for dialogue. Civil society should consider the politics and incentives of the different actors inside and outside of government to strengthen accountability. Starting engagement from a negative standpoint may discourage respective actors from supporting each other in their accountability efforts. The ways to engage include:

### 1. Support and partnership:

- Communicate with SAIs to understand their role and reports;
- Identify champions within SAIs that will work closely with civil society and invite them to engage;
- Conduct a context analysis and stakeholder map-



*Stages of Citizen  
Engagement with SAIs*

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ping with SAIs to understand and act on strategic opportunities to ensure action on audits and issues of concern to the public; and

- Offer support for SAIs in planning, monitoring, reporting and follow-up process. CSOs can: provide topics or issues of concern for SAIs to audit; report fraud, waste and abuse via “hot lines”; engage in the execution of the audit through joint audits or social audits, including verification with affected citizens; disseminate audit findings and recommendations; and engage audited entities to ensure the recommendations are acted upon.

## Key Resources:

- **The Basics of Supreme Audit Institutions – Citizen Engagement**, by Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia (ACIJ). See: <https://acij.org.ar/e-participatoryaudit/module-01/benefits-of-increased-engagement.php>
- **International Budget Partnership Resources on Audits**. See: [https://www.internationalbudget.org/search/keyword/audit/type/ibp\\_publications/](https://www.internationalbudget.org/search/keyword/audit/type/ibp_publications/)
- **Accountants with Opinions: How Can Government Auditors Drive Accountability?** Produced by International Budget Partnership. See: <https://www.internationalbudget.org/2016/11/how-government-audits-drive-accountability/>
- **Citizen Engagement Practices by Supreme Audit Institutions**. See: [http://www.intosai.org/fileadmin/downloads/downloads/4\\_documents/publications/eng\\_publications/Compendium\\_UNPAN92198.pdf](http://www.intosai.org/fileadmin/downloads/downloads/4_documents/publications/eng_publications/Compendium_UNPAN92198.pdf)

## 2. Advocacy:

- Advocate to ensure SAIs have the mandate, independence and resources to function effectively;
- Encourage SAIs to report on government programmes, including planning, spending and effectiveness, through an SDG lens;
- Advocate to ensure SAIs have the necessary information, from national to local authorities, to publish their audit reports in a timely, accessible manner; and
- Use audit reports in civil society advocacy work, including engagement with the government, legislature, media and the public.

## 3. Raise awareness:

- Launch public awareness campaigns that raise the profile of audit reports and educate citizens about the role SAIs play in holding governments to account. Such a campaign could be built around a database that tracks what the government is doing to address audit findings;
- Encourage open debates in parliament on SAI reports, that include civil society and citizens; and
- Work with oversight bodies to establish an annual “Accountability Day” whereby legislators review recent government performance. This could take place around the time the government announces the subsequent year’s budget.

- **SAls Engaging with Stakeholders Guide**, produced by INTOSAI Development Initiative. See: <http://www.idi.no/en/all-news/item/288-updating-the-sais-engaging-with-stakeholders-guide>
- **Does collaboration with Civil Society strengthen accountability institutions? An Exploration**. See: [http://170426-492690-raikfcquaxqncofqfm.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GPSA\\_Note\\_9-DoesCollaborationbetweenCivilSociety.pdf](http://170426-492690-raikfcquaxqncofqfm.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GPSA_Note_9-DoesCollaborationbetweenCivilSociety.pdf)
- **INTOSAI Journal - The International Journal of Government Auditing (the Journal)** is the official publication of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). See: <http://intosaijournal.org/>
- **The Impact of Performance Auditing: A Practice Friendly Review**. See: <http://intosaijournal.org/the-impact-of-performance-auditing-a-practice-friendly-review/>

### Case Study: Citizen Participation to Strengthen Oversight

**Colombia:** *The Comptroller General of the Republic of Colombia (CGRC) actively promotes citizen participation in the oversight process. Colombia's SAI developed a guide on joint audits with CSOs and citizens affected by public interventions. The actors provide input throughout the execution of audits: on-site; at meetings and roundtables; or through reports and any other forms of information that can help the SAI improve the audit process. CGRC has "worked to develop a civil and fiscal culture among citizens. From 2006 to 2010, it carried out 2,232 outreach activities, benefiting 281,861 citizens," according to Practical Action. It has also: "established accessible channels for receiving citizens' input and incorporating it in the audit process [and] from 2006-2010, the CGRC implemented 120 coordinated audits and created 763 citizen oversight committees. To ensure these mechanisms' success, it carried out 4,964 training activities, enabling 177,196 citizens to actively participate in the oversight process."*<sup>160</sup>

**South Korea:** *In South Korea, the Audit Office established a complaint hotline and whistle-blower mechanism through which citizens can report areas of suspected irregularities or corruption and can request audits. The hotline collects "reports on unjust handling of petitions by administrative agencies, complaints, and particularly behaviours such as unjustly refusing receipt and handling of petitions on the grounds that they may be later pinpointed by audit and inspection." The hotlines also receive "reports of corruption and fraud of public officials, including bribery, idleness, embezzlement and the misappropriation of public funds." This mechanism has been widely disseminated in South Korean society and has a dedicated page on the SAI's website.*<sup>161</sup>

160 ELLA: The Latin American Approach to Improving Public Spending Oversight. [http://ella.practicalaction.org/wp-content/uploads/files/110826\\_GOV\\_BudPubPol\\_BRIEF2\\_0.pdf](http://ella.practicalaction.org/wp-content/uploads/files/110826_GOV_BudPubPol_BRIEF2_0.pdf)

161 IDI Guidance on Supreme Audit Institutions' Engagement with Stakeholders. <http://iniciativatpa.org/2012/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Stock-take-report-on-SAls-and-citizen-engagement2.pdf>



# Using and Improving Data

## What is it?

Data are simply information, facts or evidence about something that can be used in calculating, analysing, reasoning or planning. Data may be quantitative (i.e. information that is conveyed by numbers) or qualitative (i.e. information that is conveyed by descriptive language.) Data may also be official or non-official. Official data are generally produced by National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and include data gathered from formal government processes such as censuses or household surveys. Ideally, all official data should be 'open data' meaning that they are freely available for everyone to access, use and republish as they wish, without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control.<sup>162</sup>

Non-official data are data that are produced by non-governmental actors such as research institutions, academia, the private sector, CSOs or citizens themselves.<sup>163</sup> 'Citizen-generated data' are defined by the DataShift initiative as "data that people or their organisations produce to directly monitor, demand or drive change on issues that affect them."<sup>164</sup> This data may be generated through research, social audits, crowd-sourcing online platforms, mobile phone and SMS surveys, phone calls, reports, storytelling, social media and community radio.<sup>165</sup>

## Why is it important?

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data are essential to measure progress on the SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind.<sup>166</sup> In relation to accountability, data are critical to monitor progress on the SDGs, ensuring that citizens know what their government is doing and are able to assess whether it is working. Data on the situation of vulnerable or marginalized groups are particularly critical in order to determine whether governments are fulfilling the pledges to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first. Holding data is power and access to data can open the door to conversations with policy makers, allowing CSOs and citizens alike to validate, challenge or identify gaps in official narratives of SDG progress. Where official data on the SDGs are generated in a participatory manner, they can empower citizens and support a people-centred approach to accountability by ensuring that citizens themselves are engaged in reporting and providing rationale for SDG progress.

Non-official data – including citizen-generated data – are especially important for accountability as they can offer a more complex and accurate picture of progress at all levels. Such data can complement official sources of data, fill gaps in data and/or supplement official report-

<sup>162</sup> The Open Government Partnership (2014), p. 197.

<sup>163</sup> TAP Network (2017). Expanding the Data Ecosystem: The role of "Non-Official" Data for SDG Monitoring and Review. [http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Non-OfficialDataforSDG-MonitoringandAccountability\\_FINAL.pdf](http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Non-OfficialDataforSDG-MonitoringandAccountability_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>164</sup> DataShift. <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/>

<sup>165</sup> DataShift (2017). Citizen-generated data: Facilitating the follow up and review process of the Sustainable Development Goals. <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/blog/citizen-generated-data-facilitating-follow-review-process-sustainable-development-goals/>

<sup>166</sup> UN (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 48.

ing when the quality, availability or impartiality of official data is insufficient.<sup>167</sup> The use of non-official data from different sources can also help to build trust and credibility among citizens regarding the accuracy of official monitoring and reporting on SDG progress.<sup>168</sup> Further, non-official data can help to ensure that people's perspectives and experiences – including communities or population groups that may be overlooked by official data collection processes – are documented and taken into account in SDG implementation and follow-up and review processes.<sup>169</sup> Although the 2030 Agenda does not explicitly recognize the role of non-official data, the UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution that “recommends that national statistical systems explore ways to integrate new data sources into their systems to satisfy new data needs of the 2030 Agenda.”<sup>170</sup> Non-official data should be considered as valid and credible as official data if their methodologies are as robust and open to public scrutiny as those used to produce official data.<sup>171</sup>

## How can it be used?

There are many ways that CSOs can engage with data to promote accountability for the SDGs, including the following:

**1. Advocate for official data to be open** – As an initial step, CSOs can engage in advocacy to make official data on the SDGs more open and available. Depending on the context, CSOs may wish to urge their government to do one or all of the following:<sup>172</sup>

- Make a strong public commitment to open data on the SDGs;
- Identify and begin to publish some public information on the SDGs as open data;

- Develop a government-wide policy on open data, through an inclusive process, that sets standards for how the government will manage and release information on the SDGs;
- Create public listings of all government data related to the SDGs;
- Establish new legal rights for the public to access government data on the SDGs;
- Proactively engage with and support data users to access data on the SDGs; and
- Require that open data commitments apply to all organizations handling public data.

**2. Promote and support basic data literacy** – Data in themselves may not be meaningful without skilled data users who can understand and translate complex information into simple messages for a broader set of accountability actors. CSOs can promote and support basic data literacy for information intermediaries (‘infomediaries’) such as the media, social media users, civil society groups and citizens, as a way to support the use of data as an accountability tool.<sup>173</sup> Data literacy skills include digging, collecting, cleaning, analysing, visualizing and communicating data to the public and decision-makers.<sup>174</sup>



**TIP:** CSOs should consider engaging young people as SDG infomediaries. Young people are often well positioned to play this unique role with the support of data specialists.

**3. Produce and support citizen-generated data** – CSOs can play an important role in producing data on the SDGs as well as supporting the production of citizen-generated data. CSOs can invest financial support

167 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 36; TAP Network (2017). Expanding the Data Ecosystem.

168 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 36.

169 TAP Network (2017). Expanding the Data Ecosystem.

170 UN (2017). Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/313, para. 6. [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1291226/files/A\\_RES\\_71\\_313-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1291226/files/A_RES_71_313-EN.pdf)

171 TAP Network (2017). Expanding the Data Ecosystem.

172 Adapted from: The Open Government Partnership (2014). p. 200-15.

173 TAP Network, Saferworld and UN Development Programme (2016). Making them Count: Using indicators and data to strengthen accountability for the SDGs, p. 6. <http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SDG-16-Making-them-Count-Workshop-Summary.pdf>

174 Restless Development (2015). Follow-up and Review, p. 13.

and other resources to build the capacity of civil society and citizens – including women, men and children – to collect, process and analyse data on the SDGs, including disaggregated data.<sup>175</sup> The production of survey-based perception and experiential data – which measure the direct needs, priorities, perceptions and experiences of citizens themselves – can be particularly valuable in supporting a people-centred approach to accountability for the SDGs.<sup>176</sup>

In producing citizen-generated data, CSOs should seek to work in a participatory manner with vulnerable and marginalized groups who are often excluded from official data collection processes. Data generated by people in the margins are important to build a deeper understanding of the underlying issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality and to be able to hold governments accountable for their commitment to reach those furthest behind.<sup>177</sup> The participation of marginalized groups in data collection and analysis can support their empowerment and help to open up and build a constructive dialogue with decision-makers to promote greater accountability. Further, engaging marginalized groups in producing data on the SDGs may help to address potential concerns about privacy

and identification.

CSOs engaged in producing data on the SDGs should take the following into consideration:<sup>178</sup>

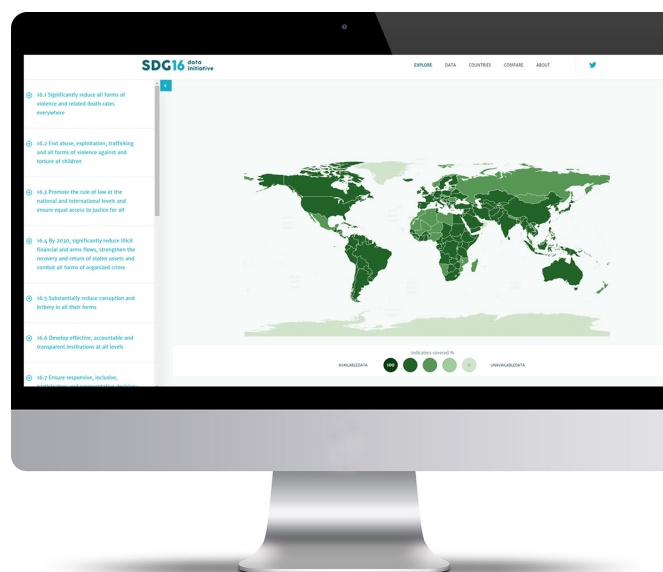
**a. Data-gathering methodology** – Is the methodology clear and consistent, and does it conform with the basic principles of a human rights-based approach to data?

**b. Types of measurement** – What are the types of measurement used and how can they be aligned with SDG data-gathering efforts?

**c. Verification of data** – Can the data be adequately verified in accordance with key principles of data validation and verification?

**d. Digital divide** – Is there a risk of creating a ‘digital divide’ if the data are generated through internet-based or Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications?

**e. Capacity-building** – Are there measures in place to ensure adequate data and methodological literacy of those collecting the data?



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175 TAP Network (2015). People-Centred Post-2015 Review & Accountability.

176 TAP Network (2017). Expanding the Data Ecosystem.

177 Participate (2017). p. 1.

178 DIHR (2017). Human Rights and Data, p. 39-40.

179 The SDG16 Data Initiative. <http://www.sdg16.org>

## A human rights-based approach to data<sup>180</sup>

In general, all data collection on the SDGs should be guided by the Human Rights-Based Approach to Data (HRBAD) developed by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The HRBAD guidance highlights:

- **Participation** – Data collection processes should ensure the free, active and meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- **Data Disaggregation** – Data should be disaggregated by key characteristics identified in international human rights law in order to compare population groups and understand the situation of specific groups.
- **Self-identification** – Population groups should be self-defining, and individuals should have the option to disclose, or withhold, information about their personal characteristics. Data collection should not create or reinforce discrimination, bias or stereotypes.
- **Transparency** – Those collecting data should provide clear, openly accessible information about the process. Data collected by the State should be openly accessible to the public.
- **Privacy** – Data disclosed by individuals should be protected and kept private, and the confidentiality of individuals' responses and personal information should be maintained.
- **Accountability** – Those collecting data are accountable for upholding human rights in their processes. Data should be used to hold States and other actors accountable for human rights.



**TIP:** CSOs should consider using innovative methods such as social media and online platforms, SMS and mobile phone technology, radio and crowdsourcing to collect citizen-generated data.

**4. Engage in partnerships on data** – CSOs can seek to establish effective partnerships in relation to data collection, both with National Statistical Offices (NSOs) as well as other key actors such as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), academia and the private sector. There is a significant amount of SDG-relevant data produced by non-state actors that can be brought to the attention of NSOs who may be able to play a role in coordinating data from different sources. Further, NSOs may be able to provide resources and tools that

assist non-State data collectors – such as CSOs – to collect quality data and to improve the comparability and usefulness of that data.<sup>181</sup> Other actors such as NHRIs may be able to assist CSOs in vetting potentially sensitive data,<sup>182</sup> while CSOs can help NHRIs by working with vulnerable and marginalized groups to produce citizen-generated data. Collaborative efforts through effective data partnerships can strengthen and expand data collection and disaggregation for the SDGs and help to ensure that data is shared and easily accessible to all, thereby strengthening the potential use of data for accountability for the 2030 Agenda.

<sup>180</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2018). A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data: Leaving No One Behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>

<sup>181</sup> DIHR (2017). Human Rights and Data, p. 37.

<sup>182</sup> DIHR (2017). Human Rights and Data, p. 39.

## Key Resources:

- **The Open Government Guide (2015)**, by the Open Government Partnership, includes a chapter on 'Open Government Data' that provides useful information on the steps that governments can take to make data more open. See: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/resources/open-government-guide>
- **The DataShift initiative** provides links to online resources that support citizen-generated data. See: <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/resources/>
- **A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data: Leaving No One Behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2018)**, by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, provides general guidance on a human rights-based approach to data (HRBAD), with a focus on data collection and data disaggregation. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>
- **The Commonwealth Youth Development Index: National and Regional Toolkit (2016)** by the Commonwealth Secretariat, provides information on building a local, national or regional level Youth Development Index (YDI). See: <http://cmydiprod.uksouth.cloudapp.azure.com/sites/default/files/2016-10/National%20YDI%20Toolkit.pdf>
- **SDG16 Data Initiative**. See: <https://sdg16report.org/>
- **Expanding the Data Ecosystem: The role of "Non-Official" Data for SDG Monitoring and Review**, by the TAP Network. See: [https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Non-OfficialDataforSDGMonitoringandAccountability\\_FINAL.pdf&hl=en](https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Non-OfficialDataforSDGMonitoringandAccountability_FINAL.pdf&hl=en)
- **SDG Goal 16 Data Indicators**, by the TAP Network. See: <http://tapnetwork2030.org/our-work/sdg-goal-16-indicators/>
- **Global SDG Indicators: Building a Framework that is Fit For Purpose**, by the TAP Network. See: <http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/TAP-Position-Paper-on-Global-Indicators-and-Statistical-Commission-FINAL.pdf>
- **Making them Count: Using indicators and data to strengthen accountability for the SDGs**, by the TAP Network. See: <http://tapnetwork2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/SDG-16-Making-them-Count-Workshop-Summary.pdf>
- The **DataShift initiative** by CIVICUS and partners aims to build the capacity and confidence of CSOs to produce and use citizen-generated data to monitor sustainable development progress, demand accountability and campaign for transformative change. See: <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/>

### Case Study: Harnessing Civil Society Expertise in Data Collection and Analysis

*Already, many CSOs have become experts in collecting and analysing data through methodologies that could be useful to governments tracking implementation of the SDGs. For example, data can be utilized from global surveys (e.g. Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer) or more localized data generated by marginalized people at the community level (e.g. the citizen-generated data project Map Kibera). Some CSOs also analyse data from publicly available (open) sources (e.g. the Publish What You Fund Aid Transparency Index), while others collate data through expert assessments (e.g. CIVICUS's annual State of Civil Society Report). Many NGOs have also started utilizing crowdsourcing technology for better data collection and analysis. Such initiatives could revolutionize monitoring efforts by enabling citizens to share their experiences and feedback on government policy gaps or failures. For example, in Egypt, HarassMap<sup>183</sup> operates as a digital platform that allows people to report harassment. This information is then showcased via a mapping tool indicating where such incidents have occurred, enabling policymakers to better target their efforts. Likewise, in India, the IPaidABribe<sup>184</sup> website has been a raging success, enabling people across the nation to report demands for bribes from government officials. This data is then mapped, and more detailed stories are included to enable follow-up by authorities. The website has been so successful that it has been replicated in 14 countries to date.<sup>185</sup>*

### Case Study: Using Data to Reduce Corruption and Bribery

**Global:** *Some governments and their agencies – such as the government of **Malaysia** and the Anti-Corruption Commissions of **Thailand** and **Indonesia** – use Consumer Price Index results as a key performance indicator to measure their anti-corruption efforts. Moreover, the CPI is distributed to Transparency International's network via the internet, including through social media sites. The results receive considerable media coverage both domestically and internationally. Drawing on the findings of the 2016 CPI, Transparency International published several web features illustrating how CPI scores translate to reality in the indexed countries, and what this means for each region in the world.<sup>186</sup>*

183 HarassMap (2018). <http://harassmap.org/en/>

184 I Paid a Bribe (2018). <http://www.ipaidabribe.com/>

185 TAP Network. Goal 16 Toolkit, p. 17.

186 SDG16 Data Initiative Report (2017). [http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_and\\_inequality\\_how\\_populists\\_mislead\\_people](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_and_inequality_how_populists_mislead_people); [http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/africa\\_corruption\\_is\\_a\\_big\\_issue\\_in\\_2016\\_african\\_elections](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/africa_corruption_is_a_big_issue_in_2016_african_elections); [http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/americas\\_sometimes\\_bad\\_news\\_is\\_good\\_news](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/americas_sometimes_bad_news_is_good_news); [http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/asia\\_pacific\\_fighting\\_corruption\\_is\\_side\\_lined](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/asia_pacific_fighting_corruption_is_side_lined).



# Working with Informal Processes



# Publishing Civil Society SDG Spotlight Reports

## What is it?

Civil society plays an important role in international monitoring processes through the production of independent “civil society reports”—which can also be referred to as “shadow reports,” “spotlight reports,” and/or “parallel reports.” While the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process is the primary channel for reporting on country-level progress on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, civil society reports are vital to ensuring an independent, robust and accurate assessment of progress within countries, and provide a direct means to promote this government accountability to its citizens.

CSOs may wish to produce a civil society SDG spotlight report to challenge or provide an alternative perspective of SDG implementation to their country’s official VNR report. These reports are particularly important where civil society have little or no opportunities to engage in official VNR processes at the national level. Such comparative independent assessments shed light on how governments are involving civil society in their implementation and review of the SDGs, and consider questions around the issue of leaving no one behind.

The scope of any civil society SDG spotlight report depends largely on the capacity and goals of the CSO carrying out the assessment. While some reports include a full evaluation of the implementation of all 17 SDGs, others may be more limited—for instance, spotlighting progress on just one SDG or even a single indicator of that Goal. In the same vein, civil society SDG spotlight reports can be produced by a single CSO or in partnership with civil society coalitions, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), academia or other stakeholders.

There is no one size-fits-all approach to reporting on SDG issues, and numerous templates and guidelines have been created in recent years to support CSOs in the drafting and dissemination process.

## Why is it important?

Meaningful civil society participation in encouraging inclusive and open SDG implementation, follow-up, review and accountability is critical to ensuring that governments are responsive to the demonstrated needs of the diverse segments of each society. In many ways, civil society stakeholders serve as the most indispensable part of the measurement, monitoring and accountability framework for the SDGs, as they often provide a critical link between governments and stakeholders. Nationally and locally-focused civil society stakeholders therefore can play a key role in monitoring and reviewing processes at the national level.

Working in constructive ways with governments is important to doing this, ideally by building trust and rapport so that governments see civil society as partners to be engaged in achieving shared goals. Providing civil society reports on SDG implementation is just one of the many ways that civil society can continue to build a positive working relationship with governments in support of the SDGs.

In general, civil society reports serve as an important mechanism for holding national governments accountable for making progress on their commitments to the 2030 Agenda. They can complement or call into question States’ official reports and also provide an avenue for civil society voices to be heard on national and inter-



## Why produce a 2030 Agenda civil society report<sup>187</sup>

Governments are expected to take the lead in monitoring and reporting on progress made against each of the SDGs and their targets. However, there are many opportunities for CSOs to participate, either as part of the official review process, or independently through parallel reviews and civil society reports.

CSOs are a crucial link between national concerns and international frameworks. They are important partners where public commitments made by States are concerned, because of their advocacy and monitoring activities. Independent, public scrutiny by civil society has the potential to make sure that governments' reports of national-level implementation of the 2030 Agenda are accurate when they are provided for regional and global monitoring processes. CSOs' civil society reports also can provide key findings and make recommendations for SDG implementation at a national level.

national stages—thereby showcasing the value of civil society engagement in SDG implementation and monitoring.

## How can it be used?

Civil society reporting represents an unofficial mechanism for monitoring and holding governments accountable on SDG implementation. As such, the processes for creating and utilizing these reports are not formalized in the same way as official government-led reporting. Given this reality, it is critical for CSOs to take care in determining whether civil society reporting is the most effective accountability mechanism to use in monitoring SDG implementation and, if so, to ensure that their reports are properly prepared and disseminated for maximum impact.

Below are helpful tips and guidelines to consider for civil society reports:

- **Preparation for reporting: Identifying partners, funding and project plans** – A comprehensive civil society report that monitors SDG implementation at the national level can take between three and six months to produce, depending on the number of people, organizations and resources involved. It is important to secure the necessary finances and other resources early on by, for instance, approaching international or larger NGOs

for grant opportunities or partnering with other CSOs who could make a financial contribution to the project. Conducting a joint project involving multiple CSOs can be a challenge, so building out a coherent project management plan and putting together a balanced team of subject matter experts is critical to ensuring timely, effective report production.<sup>188</sup>



**TIP:** CSOs should consider identifying other organizations or experts who might be interested in collaborating as partners on the report or “signing on” to the spotlight report once it is completed.<sup>189</sup>


- **What do you want to achieve? Clarifying goals and scope** – In preparing to draft a civil society report, it is important to be clear about the goals of the report and to clarify its scope from the outset. Often, many CSOs do not have the capacity to carry out a full assessment of the implementation of all 17 SDGs. CSO development platforms can be very important in this regard. Some platforms have developed spotlight reports by sending a short survey to their members asking for each organisation's assessment of the progress made by its government in implementing the SDGs in their particular area of concern, backed up by facts or data if possible. This information is then collated and forms the basis of the CSO spotlight report. One of the best ways to make a civil society report effective with lim-

<sup>187</sup> Forus International (2018). Guidelines for CSO Shadow Reports: Monitoring the Implementation of Agenda 2030 at the National Level.


<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*

ited time and resources is to decide on a limited number of key messages or priority areas to highlight for the country in question. From this it should be possible to build the data and narrative of the report.<sup>190</sup>

 **TIP:** CSOs should try to find a consistent approach to rating the government's success in implementing different aspects of the 2030 Agenda. For example, some spotlight reports use the visual aid of a "traffic light system" for evaluating government performance in different areas. A green light indicates positive progress, an orange light indicates intermediate progress and a red light indicates little or no progress at all. Alternatively, the spotlight report might use a simple rating scale such as (i) Substantive action taken, (ii) Initial Action Taken, and (iii) No Action Taken.<sup>191</sup>

**• How do you put a report together? Guidelines for drafting** – Numerous resources have been developed in recent years to assist CSOs with the drafting and dissemination of civil society reports on SDG implementation at the national level. CSOs interested in creating an impactful report to share at the HLPF and other forums should be sure to review 2030 Agenda-specific guidelines and templates for civil society reporting, such as those created by the TAP Network, Forus, Action for Sustainable Development, and UN DESA. In addition, CSOs may find resources on human rights civil society reporting by national and/or international human rights institutions, which useful, as the objectives, processes and audiences are similar to those of SDG civil society reports.

 **TIP:** CSOs should consider linking SDG commitments to laws in the country. This will help identify gaps in the implementation of SDGs and where the government may be legally bound to some action.

**• What can you do with it? Report dissemination** – At this time, there are no formal submission mechanisms for collecting civil society reports focused on SDG implementation. However, many civil society coalitions, including the TAP Network, are working to formalize collection and dissemination processes for

civil society reports in order to increase their reach and impact. It is not enough to just document a government's successes or challenges in implementing different aspects of the 2030 Agenda. Distribution of these findings is critical, and if done effectively, such reports can have impact at not just the national level, but also regional and global levels, including at the HLPF. At a minimum, CSOs should make sure their final reports can be uploaded and disseminated online. These reports should be published as stand-alone, downloadable documents that can be easily shared and disseminated online.<sup>192</sup> Beyond passive publication, CSOs also should make efforts to use their reporting to start dialogues and build relationships with others working on SDG monitoring and implementation. CSOs can do this by developing advocacy strategies around the publicization of their reports and plans for distributing findings to interested actors, including:

o *National-level actors:*

- Governmental officials at all relevant levels and ministries, including in the executive branch, parliamentarians, local authorities and relevant agencies responsible for SDG implementation; and
- Non-governmental institutions and groups, including SAIs, NHRIs, civil society groups and the media (traditional and social – see chapter on media)

o *Regional and global-level actors:*

- UN agencies, including UNDP country offices;
- Civil society actors that have created SDG civil society report submission portals and distribution networks, such as the TAP Network; and
- Other relevant bodies working on SDG monitoring, including IHRIs and the media.

 **TIP:** In an SDG civil society report, CSOs should consider citing examples of the activities they will be undertaking to deliver the 2030 Agenda either independently, alongside other stakeholders or in partnership with government.<sup>193</sup>

190 Forus International (2018). Guidelines for CSO Shadow Reports: Monitoring the Implementation of Agenda 2030 at the National Level.

191 *Ibid.*

192 *Ibid.*

193 *Ibid.*

## **Approaches and Methodologies for SDG Civil Society Reporting<sup>194</sup>**

The TAP Network created a suggested outline and guidelines on how to approach drafting a SDG civil society report, including key questions to consider answering. Below is a sample of TAP's guidance:

### **Proposed Outline for SDG Civil Society Report**

1. Executive summary
2. Introduction
  - a. Background and context to the report and outline of methodology
3. Review of Legal and Legislative Framework and Policies
  - a. Brief introduction
  - b. Assessment of frameworks
  - c. Challenges and recommendations
4. Review of Implementation
  - a. Brief introduction
  - b. Assessment of progress
  - c. Challenges and recommendations
5. Review of International Commitments (if applicable)
  - a. Assessment of progress
  - b. Challenges and recommendations
6. Civil Society participation in SDG Implementation / Follow-up
  - a. Assessment of civil society space around the SDGs (and in general)
  - b. Challenges and recommendations

### **Key questions to consider:**

- Which government body or bodies are in charge of the implementation of the national SDG implementation process?
- Have there been high-level commitments by the current administration to strengthen the legal framework, policies or institutions that are relevant to your issues?
- How has your government reported its progress on the SDG issues that you cover, and does it differ from civil society's assessment of progress?
- Has the government encountered any unanticipated obstacles in making progress on your issues? How have they worked to overcome these challenges?
- Has your government set national-level indicators to track country-level progress on the SDGs? And if so, has civil society been able to provide and contribute to this national indicator process?
- Are there any entry points for these SDG civil society reports for your government to formally consider your progress assessments and recommendations?

*See: <http://tapnetwork2030.org/civilsocietyreporting/>*

• **Engaging in the HLPF for the official VNRs** – Each July, the UN holds a meeting of the HLPF, which provides an opportunity for national governments to present VNRs on progress towards SDG implementation in their countries. Some governments involve civil society in the VNR process—even including them in official VNR delegations at the HLPF. In other countries, however, civil society is excluded from official processes. Civil society reports are even more relevant and necessary in these contexts, so that the perspective of civil society can be provided. Reporting by CSOs outside of government-led VNR processes is also critical, as there are some limitations in the official limitations to official monitoring mechanisms, including those related to selected indicators, the availability of data, and general reporting credibility. CSOs should still push to be involved with national processes, where possible, and also look to CSO coalitions, such as the TAP Network, for other opportunities to present civil society reports at official HLPF events and side events.



**TIP:** Through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the UN Human Rights Council reviews the fulfilment by each of the 193 UN Member States of their human rights obligations and commitments. The UPR process provides for the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, NHRIs and regional mechanisms. CSOs can submit written information for the HRC's final report, including the findings from their SDG civil society reports.

• **What's next? Encouraging the creation of a formal space for CSO reporting** – Despite growing calls for more independent civil society reporting on SDG implementation at the national level, no official forum exists for the findings of these reports to be collected and analysed, nor is there a mechanism to hold governments accountable where gaps and challenges are found. Yet, more and more CSOs are recognizing the value of civil society engagement through reports on SDG implementation, even outside official monitoring and accountability institutions. To strengthen the impact of individual reports, large CSO alliances like the TAP Network are making efforts to formalize collection and submission processes. TAP and other CSO alliances note that CSO advocacy and monitoring work helps showcase the value of civil society engagement, demonstrate good practice in civil society collaboration and reinforce its commitment to implementation. In

addition, these efforts—especially from collective international networks—help to make it clear that civil society is a supportive partner and important stakeholder in 2030 Agenda implementation. The more CSOs can work in coalition to make their voices heard, the more difficult it will be to exclude civil society from official processes, such as VNR delegations to the HLPF. *(To learn more about the TAP Network, partnership opportunities, and resources for supporting SDG civil society reporting, visit their website at [TAPNetwork2030.org](http://TAPNetwork2030.org).)*

• **Is the context right for a civil society report? Understanding the political climate for reporting** – CSOs thinking of creating SDG civil society report should be mindful of the political climate in their home countries—specifically taking into account the risks of such monitoring and accountability efforts. Before undertaking reporting efforts, CSOs must consider if the environment is safe by asking questions like, “How does my government respond to criticism?”, or “What are the national laws in my country concerning freedom of speech?”. While it is important to hold national governments accountable to international norms, it is also necessary that CSOs pursue such actions in safe spaces, using regional and international forums or partners if independent reporting within a country is too risky. CSOs interested in reporting can work with global organizations such as the TAP Network or Human Rights Watch to help analyse and judge the appropriateness of their political climate before undertaking a civil society report. They should also determine whether an enabling environment for drafting an impactful report exists. If the purpose of drafting a SDG civil society report is to encourage a national government in action, then it is key to assess the likelihood that such work will bring about change before undertaking the investment of producing a report.



**TIP:** Civil society reports should avoid focusing exclusively on the shortcomings of governments in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda. General or sweeping statements are difficult for governments to respond to, and easy for them to ignore. The reports should make constructive recommendations about how to achieve progress on national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Recommendations should be concrete, realistic and action oriented. It is also useful, where appropriate, to suggest time frames for solutions' implementation and the specific body that should be responsible.

## Key Resources:

- ***Beyond Voluntary National Reviews: Approaches and Methodologies for Civil Society Reporting on SDG16 (2018)***, by the TAP Network, provides an outline template for a civil society report and guiding questions to consider answering during the crafting process. See: <http://tapnetwork2030.org/civilsocietyreporting/>
- ***Guidelines for CSO Shadow Reports: Monitoring the Implementation of Agenda 2030 at the National Level (2018)***, by Forus International, includes examples of civil society reports and key steps to follow when preparing and producing a civil society SDG report. See: <http://forus-international.org/en/resources/8>
- ***Action for Sustainable Development HLPF 2018 Civil Society Report Template***, by Action for Sustainable Development Coalition, helps national CSOs consider how governments are involving civil society in their official implementation and review of the SDGs, and questions around the issue of leaving no one behind. See: [https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/HLPF-VNR\\_CS0-Report-Template\\_2018.pdf](https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/HLPF-VNR_CS0-Report-Template_2018.pdf)
- ***How should civil society stakeholders report their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2018)***, by Dr. Graham Long, is Technical Paper for the Division for Sustainable Development, UNDESA. See: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18445CSOreporting\\_paper\\_revisions\\_4May.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18445CSOreporting_paper_revisions_4May.pdf)
- ***Share Your Civil Society Spotlight Report***, by the TAP Network, is an online platform to collect and showcase spotlight reports from civil society stakeholders. See: <https://tapnetwork2030.org/sdg16reporting/>

### Case Study: Civil Society Reporting on Afghanistan's Progress towards Achieving the SDGs

**Afghanistan:** Transparency International released a country-level “civil society report” or “shadow report” for Afghanistan. The report titled, ‘Policy, SDGs and Fighting Corruption for the People: A civil society report on Afghanistan’s Sustainable Development Goals,’ builds on a series of analyses conducted in 2017, which use a common methodology to examine country progress towards SDG 16. Looking particularly at SDG targets 16.4 (reduce illicit financial and arms flows), 16.5 (substantially reduce corruption and bribery) and 16.10 (ensure public access to information), the report outlines how corruption negatively affects development through poor service provision and insecurity. It highlights Afghanistan’s progress on these three SDG 16 targets, such as establishing anti-money laundering efforts and institutions to protect against corruption, but flags that, in practice, there is an implementation gap and low inclusion of civil society in anti-corruption legislation.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>195</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development (2018). SDG Knowledge Weekly: Transparency and Accountability in the 2030 Agenda. <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/policy-briefs/sdg-knowledge-weekly-transparency-and-accountability-in-the-2030-agenda/>

# Engaging with the Media

## What is it?

“The media” or “the press” refers to the collective entities and individuals responsible for producing news, information, education and/or entertainment, that reach or influence people regularly through various means such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the internet and social media.

## Why is it important?

The media can be a powerful tool for promoting accountability in relation to government actors. A free and independent media can inform and influence public opinion about government policy. It can monitor the performance of public institutions, expose misconduct and advocate for change.<sup>196</sup> The media can also provide a platform for public debate and dialogue, ensuring that the voices and needs of citizens in relation to government policies and actions are heard.

The media is not only just an instrument to create awareness about the SDG agenda, but also play a crucial role in the implementation of it. Inclusive, just and strong institutions are the pillars a healthy society is built on. However, these institutions are not sufficient by themselves. They need to be maintained carefully. Any thriving society is built on citizens’ participation, in order to hold governments accountable and exert influence over decisions that affect the lives of people. Providing citizens with access to information (SDG target

16.10) is an essential requirement in this regard. Independent, pluralist media enable citizens to have access to information and subsequently can build well-informed, critical and resilient citizens that are empowered to shape their own development, and to participate, advocate and monitor for just and democratic societies regarding their governments. The media is a pre-condition for meaningful progress and implementation on the 2030 Agenda.

In relation to overall accountability for the 2030 Agenda, the media can provide a platform to raise awareness of the SDGs and present information as to what decision-makers and government actors are, or are not, doing. It can convey messages of progress and challenges in relation to the SDGs, highlighting the human story behind the data and numbers, and increasing pressure on governments to take action to implement the SDGs.

The media may also be used to promote the SDGs and raise awareness and expectations for credible, inclusive and participatory follow-up and review consultations.<sup>197</sup> The outreach of both traditional and new forms of media can play an instrumental role in broadening engagement in SDG follow-up and review processes, involving people who otherwise might not be able to participate, enhancing the participation of those who can engage, and potentially uncovering issues that otherwise might be overlooked.<sup>198</sup> The media can also widen the dissemination of findings from follow-up and

196 UNDP and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) (2008), p. 84; CESR and OHCHR (2013), p. 37-38.

197 Amnesty International (2016), p. 13.

198 UN Development Group (UNDG) (2017). Guidelines, p. 39.

review processes and mobilize people to act on different issues related to the SDGs.<sup>199</sup>



**TIP:** “Work with the media, as it has an especially important role to play. The media has to be capacitated in covering SDGs, including monitoring progress made on the 2030 Agenda and ensuring accountability for commitments made by the government.” – Sanele Hanyana, Save Matabeleland Coalition, Zimbabwe<sup>200</sup>

## How can it be used?

There is a range of ways in which CSOs can engage effectively with the media to promote the 2030 Agenda and ensure accountability in its delivery, including the following:

**1. Develop a strategy to work with the media** – As a starting point, CSOs wishing to work with the media should develop a strategy for engagement. At a minimum, the strategy should identify the media engagement goals or objectives, target audience(s), key messages,

type of media to engage with (e.g. print, television, radio, social media etc.), and target journalists and/or media outlets. Focusing on how to get the media to engage with you (as a CSO) should be a priority. This is, for most CSOs, the biggest challenge.

**2. Identify your media engagement goals or objectives** – There may be a number of different objectives for working with the media to further accountability for the SDGs. For example, CSOs may wish to use the media to raise awareness of the SDGs among the general public, highlight specific problems or gaps in implementation to be addressed by governments, or communicate opportunities for engagement as well as follow-up and review consultations with specific groups.

**3. Identify your key target audience(s)** – CSOs should identify their target audience(s) – i.e. whom they wish to reach with their messages via the media. Target audiences may include government policy makers, the private sector, civil society, specific population groups, etc. It is important to differentiate between types of audiences, as the target audience will impact your

### Social Media: The benefits and challenges for SDG accountability

Online platforms and social media can help to promote the SDGs and ensure that follow-up and review processes are participatory, open and inclusive. In particular, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram are an increasingly effective way to reach out to people who are more likely to use web-based platforms than traditional ones to access and share information.<sup>201</sup> However, the use of online platforms and social media is not without its limitations. Many populations remain excluded from online access due to extreme poverty, rural locations and/or Indigenous community practices.<sup>202</sup> Social media also facilitates the distribution of inaccurate, discriminatory and even wilfully violent content. These are all real challenges for CSOs seeking to maximize their impact through social, internet-based forms of communications. As a result, the use of social media and other online platforms for SDG accountability should be carefully balanced with other opportunities that allow for the offline participation of people, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid

<sup>200</sup> Cited in: Together 2030 (2016). Experiences from national voices, p. 9.

<sup>201</sup> TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 19.

<sup>202</sup> UNDG (2017). Guidelines, p. 39.

## Identifying and Analyzing Your Target Audience<sup>203</sup>

| Government/<br>Organisation/<br>Name (plus<br>contact<br>details) | How Much<br>Expertise<br>Do They<br>Have On<br>Your Prior-<br>ity Issue(s):<br>Rate 1 (low)<br>– 5 (high), or<br>qualitatively | How Much<br>Influence Do<br>They Have<br>On Your<br>Priority<br>Issue(s)?<br>Rate 1 (low)<br>– 5 (high), or<br>qualitatively | What Is Their<br>Attitude To<br>Your Priority<br>Issue(s)?<br>Rate 1 (very<br>anti) – 5<br>(very pro), or<br>qualitatively | How Import-<br>ant Is Your<br>Priority<br>Issue To<br>Them? Rate<br>1 (low) – 5<br>(high), or<br>qualitatively | Total<br>Score/Sum-<br>mary Of<br>Qualitative<br>Judge-<br>ments<br>(Highest =<br>likely<br>target) | Likely To<br>Be An Ally/<br>Opponent/<br>Target?<br>(see crite-<br>ria above) |
|---|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| Minister of<br>Foreign Affairs,<br>Brazil                         | 4  | 5  | 3  | 3  | 15  | Target  |

choice of message, type of media and media outlet. CSOs should try to identify the specific characteristics and interests of the target audience, including the type of media they are likely to engage with.<sup>204</sup>



**TIP:** In order to reach policy makers, CSOs can target business editors, in contexts where politicians are most likely to read newspapers' business section first.<sup>205</sup>

**4. Tailor key messages for media engagement** – CSOs should create compelling and simple key messages that are tailored for their target audience. A key message is what you want the target audience to understand, hear about, and/or do. In crafting effective key media messages for general public use in relation to the SDGs, CSOs should use everyday language, avoid jargon and acronyms, give the message a human and local face (i.e. a real-life story), refer only to simple statistics and limit the number of messages. CSOs should be aware that the media might not necessarily tell a story in the exact manner in which a CSO wants it to be told.<sup>206</sup> Accordingly, CSOs should keep messages short and simple and use the following questions as a guide in designing key messages for use with the media:

- What do you want the audience to understand?
- What do you want the audience to remember?
- What do you want the audience to do?<sup>207</sup>

If targeting an audience beyond the general public, the language, manner and style of key messages should be tailored accordingly.



**TIP:** When appearing on television, radio and other live forms of media, make the most important points first, and always bring the conversation back to your key messages.

See also: “Tips for creating effective key messages” in our chapter on awareness-raising.

**5. Identify the type of media to engage with** – Depending on the target audience(s), CSOs should consider the type of media to promote the SDGs and accountability in their delivery, such as print, television, radio and/or social media. The selection of type of media should be based on what is typically used by the target audience. The biggest challenge in identifying the type of media to engage with, however, can be finding media outlets that will actually carry your message, as well as those that reach your audience.

<sup>203</sup> CIVICUS (2015). Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda [http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf](http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf)


<sup>204</sup> CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014). Engaging with the Media: A Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015, p. 5. [http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf](http://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>205</sup> Transparency International, Bahamas.

<sup>206</sup> UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 113.

<sup>207</sup> CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 4.



 **TIP:** Do not underestimate radio as an effective means of communication, particularly in poorer countries where cell phone penetration is limited. According to one CSO working in rural areas in Nigeria, “everyone carries a transistor radio, so if you want to reach them you have to go to radio, and you have to speak in the local language.”

## 6. Identify specific journalists and media outlets to work with

– CSOs should identify specific journalists and media outlets that are best suited to convey its messages to its target audience. CSOs should conduct research on media outlets and journalists – by reading newspapers and magazines, watching TV, listening to the radio and researching online – and make note of any journalists who cover stories related to development, the SDGs and/or wider public sector issues.<sup>208</sup>

**7. Be proactive and contact journalists** – Once CSOs have identified specific journalists, they should be proactive in reaching out to them. CSOs should contact journalists directly by phone or email, express interest in the stories they cover and, in certain instances where strong relations already exist, ask them what sort of stories they are looking for. CSOs should explain how they may be able to help with new, interesting and/or relevant information about stories related to SDG accountability that the journalists may already be interested in and confirm the best method and timeline for contacting the journalist in the future. Once initial contact is established, CSOs should find ways to communicate regularly with the journalist.<sup>209</sup>

**8. Develop professional working relationships with journalists** – CSOs should seek to develop positive professional working relationships with journalists by adhering to the following:

**a. Make it easy for the journalist** – Provide concise and clear written or visual information via press releases, opinion pieces, story pitches and/or press briefing information packs. Include contact information, background information on the issue, facts and statistics,

quotations from experts and/or infographics where relevant.<sup>210</sup> Also, CSOs should tailor their story to the established reporting line. In other words, present what you want to get across as fitting into what the journalist or media outlet already wants to talk about;


**b. Know and adhere to deadlines** – Be aware of the journalist’s deadline – which can vary depending on the type of media – and as far as possible work within their timeframes;

**c. Be credible** – Always provide accurate, reliable, and high-quality information and statistics so that journalists will come to know your CSO as a trustworthy source for information;

**d. Respond promptly and professionally to media enquiries** – Return phone calls and emails promptly and commit to get back to a journalist if you don’t know the answer to a question. Never lie or make up facts;<sup>211</sup> where you are not 100 per cent sure of the facts, be open about their degree of reliability;

**e. Develop a positive relationship over time** – Invite journalists to learn about your CSO before stories develop. This is more often how strong relationships with the media are developed than through a particular story. Get to know what kinds of stories the journalist likes to cover;<sup>212</sup>

**f. Link specific SDG themes to journalists’ professional expertise, and present the specific SDGs as an instrument to create more awareness and hold governments accountable** – For instance, explain linkages between a journalist’s expertise in environmental issues, health care and education and the relevant SDGs.

 **TIP:** Consider different ways to engage with journalists, including writing press releases and letters to the editor and holding press briefings and media events. For helpful guidance on writing press releases and holding press conferences, see: *Engaging with the Media: A Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

208 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 5.

209 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 6-8.

210 UNDP and DCAF (2008) p. 113.

211 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 8.

212 CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum (2014), p. 8.

## Key Resources:

• ***Engaging with the Media: A Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit for Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014)***, by CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum, provides a guide to the strategic use of the media and social media and includes a useful set of tools and tips to help civil society develop effective communications strategies. It offers advice on how to target messages for broadcast, press and social media, identify and build relationships with journalists, conduct interviews and hold press conferences. See: <https://www.sustainabledevelopment2015.org/AdvocacyToolkit/index.php/media-guide/journalists-toolkit>

### Case Study: Media as Partner in Raising Awareness about SDG 16

**Nigeria:** An NGO in Nigeria has had success getting the media to report on the SDGs, and particularly Goal 16. “We involve media in everything we do, we are friends to the media, so all the policy areas that we work on are always on the news.” One of the reasons why this NGO has been successful in engaging the media is the Nigerian media’s steady appetite for stories about corruption. “Anything that has to do with corruption is news - they like to report on it.” The relatively free environment for the media in Nigeria has also helped to facilitate this relationship. The NGO has been able to cultivate good relationships with the media by making journalists feel like they are involved in the programmes, rather than just calling on them when they need media coverage. “Normally in my country if you want to engage the media you have to have a lot of money in your purse, but if you know how to manage your relationship with the press a lot of things are given to you free of charge – even free advertisements, because they feel like they are part and parcel of what you are doing.”<sup>213</sup>

### Case Study: Media’s Crucial Role in Implementation of 2030 Agenda

**Indonesia:** In Indonesia, *Tempo Magazine* enables citizens to keep State institutions accountable. Last year, the magazine reported on widespread corruption in the Sukamiskin prison complex, one of the most well-known prisons in the country. The investigation led to the arrest of the head of the prison on bribery charges.

**Bangladesh:** In Bangladesh, large parts of the population have trouble reading and writing. Local radio stations enable people in isolated parts of the country to know what is going on around them. They can use this knowledge to take part in public debates and influence decision-making.

**Zambia:** In Zambia, vulnerable women in townships are taught how to make short videos and audio reports with their mobile phone on issues they are facing. These stories have contributed to holding the local government accountable for failing to supply water, health care and education.<sup>214</sup>

213 TAP Workshop (2018). Case study.

214 Free Press Unlimited (2018). Case study.

# Raising Awareness through Public Outreach Campaigns

## What is it?

Awareness-raising is a process that seeks to inform and educate people about a topic or issue with the intention of influencing their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs towards the achievement of a defined purpose or goal.<sup>215</sup> It can mobilize the power of public opinion in support of an issue and thereby influence the political will of decision makers.<sup>216</sup> There are multiple awareness-raising strategies, methods and tools that can be used to convey and spread messages, and to gather the support necessary to influence public opinion.

Depending on the topic, awareness-raising efforts may include the following activities: issuing press releases, briefings and commentaries; disseminating reports, studies and publications; making written or oral submissions to parliamentary committees and inquiries; working with the media; holding public meetings and events; convening conferences and workshops; and creating and contributing to educational materials.<sup>217</sup> Information may be disseminated through a range of different means or tools such as radio, television, video, film, the internet, social media, mobile phones, newspapers, newsletters, leaflets, poster campaigns and the arts. A variety of visual tools such as stickers, logos, t-shirts, armbands, bracelets and banners also may be used.<sup>218</sup>

## Why is it important?

Awareness-raising and dissemination of information about the SDGs is critical to create an enabling environment for accountability, promote participatory and inclusive processes for follow-up and review, and build ownership of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>219</sup> For example, awareness-raising can be used to promote an understanding of existing laws and rights in relation to the SDGs as well as opportunities to participate in public consultations on SDG implementation and review – including in relation to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Raising awareness of the SDGs among the general public – including awareness of specific SDG targets – is necessary in order for citizens to be able to hold their government accountable for the 2030 Agenda. All people – including marginalized and vulnerable groups – should be aware of and understand the commitments their government has made under the 2030 Agenda and how they can meaningfully engage in SDG implementation and accountability processes. Raising public awareness of the SDGs is also essential to foster the political and social change needed to achieve the ambitious agenda.

215 Sayers, R. (2006). Principles of Awareness Raising. UNESCO: Bangkok, p. 11-12. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001476/147637e.pdf>

216 UNDP and DCAF (2008). p. 74.

217 UNDP and DCAF (2008). p. 26.

218 UNDP and DCAF (2008). p. 80.

219 UN DSD and UN DESA (2018). Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, p. 16.


## How can it be used?

There are a number of actions that CSOs can take to raise awareness of the SDGs in order to further accountability for the 2030 Agenda, including the following:

**1. Develop an awareness-raising strategy** – As a starting point, CSOs should consider developing an awareness-raising strategy<sup>220</sup> that includes the following components:

- Goal or problem to be addressed – The long-term outcome you wish to achieve and/or the problem you wish to address;
- Objectives – The short-term outcomes you wish to achieve;
- Target groups – The relevant groups or individuals you wish to target with your messages;
- Messages – The key and consistent messages you wish to convey to raise awareness;
- Methods, tactics or activities to raise awareness – Consider the most effective methods or tools to deliver your messages on the SDGs to your target group(s); and
- Monitoring and evaluation plan – This plan should assess whether progress is being made towards meeting the objectives and goal and, if not, what adjustments need to be made to ensure success.<sup>221</sup>

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 **TIP:** “Raise awareness between grassroots organisations to ensure an inclusive implementation and follow-up process.” – Laura Becerra Pozos, DECA, Equipo Pueblo, AC<sup>222</sup>

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 **TIP:** Engage with vulnerable and marginalized groups in designing and implementing your awareness-raising strategy on the SDGs in order to leave no one behind.


**2. Work in partnership and coalitions with other CSOs and stakeholders** – Awareness-raising campaigns tend to be more successful and have a greater impact when they are conducted by a network or coalition of CSOs. The wider the coalition, the harder it is to ignore. Accordingly, CSOs should endeavour to build partnerships with other CSOs – at local, national and/or international levels – to conduct joint awareness-raising campaigns on the SDGs generally or to promote specific opportunities for SDG implementation and review. In addition to strengthening the power and reach of the campaign, these partnerships facilitate the exchange of expertise, knowledge and strategy among CSOs. CSOs may also wish to consider partnering with other key stakeholders such as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) to promote awareness of SDG implementation and review processes.

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 **TIP:** CSO forums are a useful venue for CSOs to reach out to a broader set of possible partners and to network with each other.

**3. Identify target audience and tailor awareness-raising initiative appropriately** – CSOs should seek to identify the individuals or groups whose awareness of the SDGs is the most important to achieve their specific goal in relation to SDG accountability. Target groups may include key decision-makers, local authorities, parliamentarians, the media, vulnerable or marginalized groups, or the general public. Once identified, CSOs may wish to survey or assess the target group’s initial level of awareness through small focus groups. The results of the assessment can be utilized to tailor the awareness-raising campaign and its messages appropriately and to evaluate the impact of the campaign in the future.

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 **TIP:** Use the right messenger to raise awareness of the SDGs. Ensure that your message comes from people who have authority and credibility among your target group.

220 UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 91.

221 UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 79.

222 Cited in: Together 2030 (2016). Experiences from national voices, p. 17.

## Targeting children and youth to raise awareness of the SDGs

Nearly half of the world's population – approximately 42 per cent – is under the age of 25.<sup>223</sup> Today's generation of children and youth is the largest in human history. Children and young people can be instrumental as a target group to raise awareness of the SDGs and to put pressure on governments to follow through on their commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda. CSOs engaged in awareness-raising campaigns and activities can benefit from the participation and engagement of children and young people by tapping into their innovative ideas and strategies, as well as their strength in numbers.<sup>224</sup>

### 4. Create key messages for your target audience –

CSOs should aim to create clear, concise, consistent, compelling and simple key messages that are limited in number to help ensure that they are memorable to the target audience.<sup>225</sup> Key messages that seek to raise awareness of the SDGs – and related implementation and review processes – may include a clear call to action or request as to what you want your target audience to do. In developing key messages, CSOs may wish to conduct research into how a particular target group forms opinion and who or what influences them.



#### Tips for creating effective key messages<sup>226</sup>

- Tailor your messages to your specific target group(s).
- Try to localize the SDGs in your messages so that their relevance in the local or national context and impact on people's daily lives becomes clear
- Use evidence-based data and arguments in your messages. Numbers and research results can often be very persuasive.
- Include stories in your messages. Storytelling is a powerful means to connect with people on a deeper emotional level and to motivate them to take action.
- Refer to comparative examples from other countries or areas, if appropriate.
- Avoid using jargon or acronyms that your target group may not understand.
- Include a call to action as to what you want your target group to do, if appropriate.

### 5. Consider the most effective methods to raise awareness of the SDGs –

CSOs have a range of different methods and tools that can be used – individually or jointly to reinforce each other – to raise awareness of the SDGs, including the following:

- Producing educational resources such as reports, studies and infographics;
- Holding or participating in events such as thematic discussions, roundtables, seminars, webinars, workshops, conferences, debates, vigils, exhibitions and demonstrations;
- Utilizing radio – including community radio – which can be a powerful means to spread information and raise awareness, especially in poor and rural areas;<sup>227</sup>
- Producing audio-visual material such as television, video and documentary film;
- Using the internet, including online forums, petitions, groups and interactive websites, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.;
- Using wireless communication such as mobile phones and text messaging, which are valuable for people living in societies where freedom of information and association is limited;<sup>228</sup>

223 The World Bank. Chart: How Is the World's Youth Population Changing? <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-how-worlds-youth-population-changing>

224 UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 89.

225 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 19.

226 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 18-19.

227 UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 81.

228 UNDP and DCAF (2008), p. 82-83.

- Engaging the media including through press releases, briefings, newspaper articles and opinion pieces, and conducting media campaigns; [See chapter on engaging the media]
- Networking (online and offline) including creating and maintaining a network of contacts to share and disseminate information to build awareness around the SDGs;<sup>229</sup> and
- The arts – including art, satire, spoken word, music, street theatre and comedy – which can be a powerful vehicle to raise public awareness and consciousness.<sup>230</sup>

**6. Consider the timing of awareness-raising activities** – While awareness-raising of the SDGs can be done at any time, CSOs may want to leverage publicity around major events – such as leaders’ summits and meetings – or relevant international commemoration days in order to increase the reach and impact of their message. The UN provides a helpful list of key international dates, many of which relate directly to SDG targets and/or goals.<sup>231</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/observances/international-days/>

## Key Resources:

- ***The Advocacy Toolkit: Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014)***, by CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum, provides detailed guidance on how to prepare for, implement and manage an awareness-raising and/or advocacy campaign. See: <https://www.sustainabledevelopment2015.org/index.php/news/284-news-sdgs/1544-advocacy-toolkit-influencing-the-post-2015-development-agenda>
- ***SDGs in Your Municipality: 50 Practical Awareness Raising Examples***, by the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VWSG), offers practical examples to introduce the SDGs to a wider audience. See: <http://www.cib-uclg.org/news/sdgs-your-municipality-50-practical-awareness-raising-examples>

## Case Study: Hundreds of People Take Part in Dizzy Goals Challenge

**Global:** Football is one of the world’s most powerful communication tools—reaching young and old in every corner of the world. In 2015, the Global Goals Campaign launched its #DizzyGoals Challenge, a social media public outreach campaign to raise awareness about the UN’s new 17 SDGs. Famous footballers and celebrities such as Gareth Bale, Gary Lineker, Alan Shearer, Liverpool FC, Spurs and Crystal Palace FC were among those who took part in the Challenge to raise awareness of the Global Goals. As part of the campaign, participants filmed themselves attempting to score “dizzy goals,” which involves running around a spot until the world starts to spin, and then trying to score a penalty kick in an open goal. The campaign gained massive traction worldwide and helped to make the new Global Goals famous. In addition to participating in the #DizzyGoals Challenge, the Global Goals Campaign used the social media campaign to encouraged participants to urge their leaders to show support for the Goals at the UN.<sup>232</sup>

229 Amnesty International (2016). p. 13.

230 UNDP and DCAF (2008). p. 83; Restless Development (2015). Follow-up and Review: How to Scale up Ambition on Youth-led Accountability for the SDGs, p. 18. <http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/follow-up-and-review-how-to-scale-up-ambition-on-youth-led-accountability-for-the-sdgs-pdf>

231 TAP Network (2016). Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, p. 18.

232 Action/2015 (2015). Hundreds of people are taking part in the Dizzy Goals Challenge. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/hundreds-of-people-are-taking-part-in-the-dizzy-go/>



# Approaches to Accountability of Other Actors



# Accountability of Civil Society Stakeholders

## What is it?

“Civil society” is a very broad term, which CIVICUS states covers “non-governmental organisations, activists, civil society coalitions and networks, protest and social movements, voluntary bodies, campaigning organisations, charities, faith-based groups, trade unions and philanthropic foundations.”<sup>233</sup> The World Bank builds on this definition, outlining that it refers to “the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations.”<sup>234</sup>

For the sake of this report, civil society can be defined through multiple lenses: collective and voluntary organizations; holding values that seek to bring social, economic and political progress; and committed to open debate in the “public square.”<sup>235</sup> Any non-governmental and non-profit organization or collection of individuals that meet this loose definition can legitimately be described as a part of civil society, making it hard to develop one cohesive accountability mechanism or set of principles that relate to all.

The 2030 Agenda outlines a number of expectations for

civil society, but it is critical to view these in the context of the collective demands made by civil society through the negotiation process to devise the “post-2015 development agenda” that would become the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Civil society, through a range of vehicles including Beyond 2015, a global civil society campaign that pushed for a strong and legitimate successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals, made it clear that they wanted to be considered as key stakeholders in sustainable development. As a result, the responsibilities and expectations outlined in the 2030 Agenda were not imposed by Member States but the outcome of a negotiated process where civil society had secured a role. This is important because it adds to the voluntary nature of SDG implementation: the momentum behind the responsibilities placed on civil society was internally generated, and therefore requires a high level of ownership for effective accountability.

## Why is it important?

The 2030 Agenda acknowledges the contribution of civil society to SDG implementation,<sup>236</sup> recognizes the importance of partnership including civil society,<sup>237</sup> and encourages the inclusion of civil society within coun-

233 CIVICUS (2018). <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/who-we-are/about-civicus>

234 World Bank (2018). Defining Civil Society. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,,contentMDK:20101499--menuPK:244752--pagePK:220503--piPK:220476--theSitePK:228717,00.html>

235 UK Civil Society Almanac (2018). What is Civil Society. <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac12/what-is-civil-society/>

236 Long, Graham (2018). How should civil society stakeholders report their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?, paragraph 41. UN DESA. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18445CSOreporting\\_paper\\_revisions\\_4May.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18445CSOreporting_paper_revisions_4May.pdf)

237 Long, Graham (2018).



try-level preparations for a government's Voluntary National Review.<sup>238</sup> Paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda states that "The HLPF will support participation in follow-up and review processes by the major groups and other relevant stakeholders in line with Resolution 67/290. We call on these actors to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda."<sup>239</sup> In a recent technical paper published by UN DESA, this has been described as "deceptively complicated" and necessitating a sensitive architecture that recognizes the diverse nature of civil society, the breadth of the 2030 Agenda and the different ways in which civil society contribute.<sup>240</sup>

Civil society clearly have a responsibility to develop mechanisms by which they will be held accountable, but it is rarely clear to whom they should be accountable and for what. They need to be held accountable by government on a regulatory footing (ensuring financial conduct and adherence to the legislative framework), but challenging government systems is a critical role for civil society. It may not be simple to unpack this distinction, especially in contexts where civic space is shrinking, and governments are putting in place restrictive legislation for civil society. In addition, civil society may be comprised of or represent a specific section of society, and this will require accountability to members and stakeholders. For larger international NGOs, which make up a relatively small proportion of civil society but a significant proportion of funding, there are additional complications in accountability to beneficiary communities, donors and peer groups.

As a result, the most important aspect of civil society accountability is clarity from each civil society group about what its individual contribution is. Outlining these, in the context of the 2030 Agenda, should focus on the following key responsibilities:

- Promote the voice and participation of people in decisions that affect their lives, especially in ensuring that the 2030 Agenda reaches the "furthest behind first;"<sup>241</sup>

- Hold governments accountable for their responsibility to implement the 2030 Agenda in a way that respects the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environmental and social) in an indivisible manner that leaves no one behind;<sup>242</sup>

- Reflect and respect a diverse range of perspectives, in line with a commitment to a civic space;<sup>243</sup>

- Ensure transparency in operations and strategy, and a commitment to openness on successes and failures (SDG target 16.6); and

- Commit to working in fair and respectful partnerships in the implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda (SDG target 17.17).

## How can it be used?

There are a number of potential mechanisms for accountability that can be used by CSOs, but they should include a commitment to:

- **Mapping contributions**, in terms of compliance to the 2030 Agenda and key principles and impact of work on SDG implementation – this should include a process of strategic alignment, to ensure that there is clarity over the CSO's contribution and how it will be reported;

- **Being clear to whom reporting is appropriate** and about what – this should include sharing information on the 2030 Agenda and the CSOs' specific contribution to key stakeholders and their role in holding the CSO you accountable;

- **Reporting on the specific benefit of including civil society** within SDG planning and accountability cycles – it is important to communicate the role that the CSO can play in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the groups or issues that will lack representation without its participation. This is in addition to the more general principle of participation and inclusion.

<sup>238</sup> Long, Graham (2018).

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*

# Accountability of the Private Sector

Business coalitions and private sector leaders had a prominent voice in the process to craft the 2030 Agenda, and they are playing an active role in efforts to implement the SDGs, with companies announcing SDG alignment processes, lenders creating ‘SDG Bonds’ and corporate reporting on the SDGs becoming more common. UN officials and governments, likewise, frequently stress the need for private funding to implement the 17 SDGs.

But stakeholders have highlighted risks of public-private partnerships (PPPs), and called for developing mechanisms to protect the sustainable development agenda where it may conflict with private interests. As expectations of businesses evolve in the new era of the SDGs, businesses need to be accountable for maximizing positive development outcomes. They need to fully understand, take responsibility for and learn from the range of their impacts. Civil society actors need means to ensure this takes place.

This section describes: what UN agreements say about business’ role in the 2030 Agenda; what kind of actors the “private sector” includes; and why accountability is important. It outlines tools for holding businesses accountable in the national context.

## UN agreements’ references to private sector involvement

The 2030 Agenda specifically mentions the need to involve the private sector, with governments calling on all businesses to help solve sustainable development challenges with their creativity and innovation.<sup>244</sup> Similarly, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development (AAAA) urges businesses to embrace a business model that takes account of the environmental, social and governance impacts of their activities, and encourages impact investing, which combines a return on investment with non-financial impacts.<sup>245</sup> The AAAA also recognizes “the enormous investment needs” and encourages increased private investments.<sup>246</sup>

## What is the private sector?

The 2030 Agenda acknowledges the private sector’s diversity, “ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals”.<sup>247</sup> Experts stress that “the private sector” is not a homogenous group but contains both a multinational corporation on one end of a spectrum and a small, local business on the other. The needs of the latter, “seeking to sustain itself or even expand and those of a large multinational looking to invest in a foreign country rarely have much in common and are

<sup>244</sup> 2030 Agenda, paragraph 67.

<sup>245</sup> 2030 Agenda, paragraph 37.

<sup>246</sup> 2030 Agenda, paragraph 13, inter alia

<sup>247</sup> 2030 Agenda, paragraph 67.

often diametrically opposed.”<sup>248</sup> Treating each private actor as an individual may reveal different opportunities than assuming that one’s motivations and priorities are the same as another’s.

## Why is private sector accountability important?

Because they are not part of a government, private businesses exist outside traditional accountability systems. Therefore, the private sector’s involvement in meeting a country’s social, environmental and economic needs poses an accountability “deficit.” This is a particular problem in countries where governments are enthusiastically and uncritically embracing PPPs for development.<sup>249</sup>

Despite these risks, it may be necessary to find ways to engage the private sector without threatening progress towards the inclusive, sustainable world we want. A shift towards more accountable business behaviour would have a dramatic effect on the world’s ability to achieve the SDGs.

## Accountability mechanisms for private sector

The following tools can be used by civil society groups in their national context in order to hold private actors accountable.

**Norms: Principles and Rights** – The AAAA outlines a role for the private sector in mobilizing financial resources for the 2030 Agenda, but it also underlines that business must act in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and other relevant international standards and agreements.<sup>250</sup> The UNGPs establish the corporate

responsibility to respect human rights, which implies businesses’ addressing negative impacts of their activities, and communicating about such impacts.

- **Reporting** – Governments have begun conducting national-level review processes of SDG implementation in their countries (called the Voluntary National Review). The 2030 Agenda suggests that these processes should incorporate the activities of the private sector. To facilitate this and other components of the follow-up and review architecture for the 2030 Agenda, per SDG target 12.6, companies are encouraged to report on their impacts on sustainable development through a “sustainability reporting” process. Current trends and practices in sustainability reporting build on “corporate social responsibility” practices including environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting.

### Key frameworks and initiatives for sustainability reporting<sup>251</sup>

- The **UN Global Compact** provides ten principles that participating companies should adhere to with regards to human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption. Further, companies are required to submit an annual Communication on Progress (COP) outlining progress made in implementing the ten principles. The ten principles of the UN Global Compact are aligned with the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).<sup>252</sup>

- **Paragraph 47** of the 2012 Outcome Document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), ‘The Future We Want,’ acknowledges the importance of corporate sustainability reporting, and encourages companies, especially publicly listed and large companies, to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle. Since then, a number of governments have formed the “Group of Friends of Paragraph 47,” to advance the promotion of corporate sustainability

248 Glennie, J. The Guardian (2011). <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/may/10/private-sector-small-business-not-just-multinationals>

249 Donald, K. (2018). Blog.

250 HRs in Follow-up and Review, p. 61

251 HRs in Follow-up and Review, p. 64-65

252 <https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx>

reporting. The Group is supported by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and GRI.<sup>253</sup>

- The **OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises** provide recommendations for responsible business conduct, stipulating, inter alia, that enterprises should 1) contribute to economic, environmental and social progress with a view to achieving sustainable development, and 2) respect the internationally recognised human rights of those affected by their activities. Enterprises must ensure disclosure of timely and accurate information. The 44 countries adhering to the Guidelines have made a binding commitment to implement them.<sup>254</sup>
- GRI, the UN Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) have developed the **SDG Compass** to support companies in aligning their strategies with the SDGs and in measuring and managing their contribution.<sup>255</sup>

- The **UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework** provides comprehensive guidance for companies to report on human rights issues in line with their responsibility to respect human rights, as specified in the UNGPs. The Framework provides a set of questions that companies should strive to answer in order to know and show that they meet their responsibility to respect human rights in practice.<sup>256</sup>

- The **EU Directive on disclosure of non-financial and diversity information** is an example of a strong regional framework. In accordance with this Directive, businesses should disclose: relevant and useful information on their policies, main risks and outcomes relating to at least environmental matters; social and employee aspects; respect for human rights; anticorruption and bribery issues; and diversity in their board of directors.

<sup>253</sup> <http://www.unep.org/resourceefficiency/Business/SustainableandResponsibleBusiness/Reporting/FriendsOfParagraph47/tabid/105011/Default.aspx>

<sup>254</sup> OECD (2018). <http://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/oecdguidelinesformultinationalenterprises.html>

<sup>255</sup> HRs in Follow-up and Review, p. 62, <http://sdgcompass.org/>

<sup>256</sup> UN Guiding Principles (2018). The UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework is the world's first comprehensive guidance for companies to report on how they respect human rights. <http://www.ungpreporting.org/>



# Engaging with Other Opportunities for Accountability



*Thus far, this Handbook has focused on promoting effective CSO engagement in monitoring and accountability work for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national and local level. However, opportunities also exist for CSOs to engage with relevant actors, institutions, processes and mechanisms at regional and international levels, as well as thematic and other approaches to SDG accountability.*

## Regional bodies and forums

The primary responsibility for implementing the 2030 Agenda rests with national governments, but many countries come together via regional bodies and forums to cooperate and work together to make progress on SDG implementation.

Countries in a given region often share specific concerns and priorities and confront similar challenges, based on comparable geographies, macroeconomic structures, cultures and other shared characteristics. Thus, neighbouring national governments can benefit from both inter-regional cooperation and mutual learning. Regional forums and bodies provide a space for such collaboration and the sharing of best practices. They can encourage countries to review progress more regularly and learn from the successes and failures of regional peers. Governments also tend to appreciate regionally comparative perspectives, and the results of regional monitoring are more likely to be used in policymaking and sustained over time, not least because national governments are usually eager to compare their performance to that of neighbouring countries or regional peers.

Evidence from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) suggests that regional networking, benchmarking and peer review can catalyse action by invoking reputational concerns and making progress appear more achievable. For example, Indonesia and Mexico came to prioritize MDG implementation at least in part out of a desire to position themselves as

regional leaders. In Zambia, the realization that the country was lagging behind other African countries in making progress towards MDG 5 (reducing maternal mortality) helped mobilize top-level political support for prioritizing the issue.<sup>257</sup>

Regional follow-up and review forums can also provide an important space for promoting thematic goals, such as maintaining a focus on gender equality and strengthening gender-responsive implementation. Regional entities can foster political commitment to and national ownership of gender equality commitments by linking the 2030 Agenda to regionally specific agreements.

CSOs interested in promoting SDG accountability through regional approaches should consider engaging with the following regional bodies and forums:

- **UN Regional Commissions:** At the regional level, national governments are required to identify the most suitable regional forum for following up and reviewing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, building on existing mechanisms and successful experiences. The UN Regional Commissions have emerged as one of the most important forums for regional sustainable development processes, and provide inclusive platforms for regional reviews.<sup>258</sup> Regional processes facilitated by the UN Regional Commissions provide a forum for peer learning through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussions on shared targets. These forums are usually held between March and May but do not follow a systematic approach. They tend to include: regional intergovernmental forums focused on specific

257 UN Women, p. 39

258 CESR/UN Women, p. 16. 2030 Agenda (2015), paragraph 81.

themes; agreement on region-specific priorities and indicators; and regional thematic and progress reports. Regional processes are also important for ensuring that global and regional agendas—such as the **African Union’s Agenda 2063** or the **European Union’s Consensus for Development**—are aligned with the 2030 Agenda in order to avoid duplication or fragmentation in the pursuit of gender equality and sustainable development. National accountability can be complemented by regional dialogue and monitoring in coordination with and making use of UN Regional Commissions. Civil society engagement at this level is critical to contribute knowledge-sharing, learning and identification of good practices, and in generating solutions and mutual support.<sup>259</sup>

- **Sustainable Development Forums:** Regional Forums on Sustainable Development (RFSD) have been established in many regions by the UN Regional Commissions and help facilitate follow-up and review of the implementation of the Agenda. RFSDs—such as the African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (ARFSD), Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, and Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD)—serve as hubs for follow-up and review activities and help to facilitate peer learning and exchange of best practices, which then feed into the HLPF.<sup>260</sup> These Forums serve as important mechanisms for monitoring and tracking progress in implementation at the regional level, as well as for mobilizing and ensuring the participation of stakeholders.

- **Regional human rights bodies and mechanisms:**

- o **Inter-American Human Rights System:** Being responsible for monitoring and ensuring implementation of human rights in 35 countries of the Americas, the Inter-American system is composed of two entities: a commission and a court. Both bodies can decide individual complaints concerning alleged human rights violations and may issue emergency protective measures when an individual or the subject of a complaint is at immediate risk of irreparable harm.<sup>261</sup>

- o **European Human Rights System:** In Europe, the principal judicial and quasi-judicial organs responsible for defining and overseeing States’ compliance with their regional human rights obligations are the **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** and the **European Committee of Social Rights**, both created under the auspices of the Council of Europe. The ECtHR has jurisdiction to decide complaints submitted by individuals and States concerning violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, which principally concerns civil and political rights; whereas the Committee oversees the protection of most economic and social rights in most of Europe. In addition, the **Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights** serves as an independent monitor, highlighting issues of concern in the region. The Commissioner’s responsibilities include assisting national governments in implementing regional human rights standards, promoting understanding and awareness of human rights in the region, identifying gaps in protection, facilitating the activities of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and similar actors, and providing advice and information on human rights protection in Europe.<sup>262</sup>

- o **African Human Rights System:** The African human rights system is composed of two entities: a commission and a court. The **African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR)** promotes and protects human rights in the 54 Member States of the African Union, which – with the exception of South Sudan – have all ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. The Commission accepts complaints from individuals, groups of individuals, non-governmental organizations and States concerning alleged violations of the Charter. The second organization guarding human rights on the African continent is the **African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights (AfCHPR)**. This is a regional human rights tribunal with advisory and contentious jurisdiction concerning the interpretation and application of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which is also referred to as the Banjul Charter.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>259</sup> TAP Network (2018). Position paper.

<sup>260</sup> Danish Institute of Human Rights. HR/2030, p. 17.

<sup>261</sup> Amnesty International. p. 33.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*

• **Other bodies and forums (including peer review mechanisms):** There are a number of other bodies and forums, including peer review mechanisms, with which CSOs can engage at the regional level for SDG monitoring and accountability. In Asia, for instance, CSOs might seek to collaborate with the **Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (RCEM)** or the **Asian Parliamentary Forum**. Other relevant peer review mechanisms include the **African Peer Review Mechanism**, the peer reviews of the **Pacific Island Forum** and the **Organization for Economic Cooperation Development initiative**, which cover many thematic aspects of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>264</sup> Finally, routine reports on regional support and achievements from both public and private and civil society sources, such as the **EU's annual "Accountability Report on Financing for Development"** or **Concord Europe's annual "Aid Watch Report,"** are useful accountability tools that employ both learning and peer pressure "naming and shaming" mechanisms.<sup>265</sup> The EU even has a programme for peer reviews of national sustainable development policies, though this is rarely used.<sup>266</sup>

## Engaging with the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Every year, the UN hosts its High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) where national governments have the opportunity to present VNRs as part of the formal follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>267</sup> The HLPF's mandate is to: provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on the 2030 Agenda's implementation and follow-up; keep track of progress on the SDGs; spur coherent policies informed by evidence, science and country experiences; and address new and emerging issues.

Since the HLPF plays the central role at the apex of the review architecture for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the global level, what does this mean for participation of civil society at the national level?

Civil society can engage in various ways in the Forum,

many have which have been described in detail elsewhere in this Handbook:

- **Joining their government's delegation** to the HLPF when they present Voluntary National Reviews (see Chapter 5 for more information on engaging with the VNRs);

- **Issuing their own reports** on their government's experiences with SDG implementation, or a "spotlight" or "shadow" report to be issued alongside the government's (see Chapter 12 for more information on producing civil society SDG reports);

- **Providing data** or other information to be used in global stocktaking reports of SDG progress (see Chapter 11 for more information on using data for SDG accountability), including the Secretary-General's report on 'Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals,' which provides a global overview of "the current situation of the Goals" each year; and 'The Sustainable Development Goals Report' produced by the UN Statistics Division, which reviews the preceding year's progress towards implementation. Both draw on the available official data for the global indicators, which can be found in the Global SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>), and is sourced from the "custodian" UN agencies for each indicator. The data collection focal points and their contact information are compiled here: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataContacts/>;

- Participating at the global level in ways that domestic processes may not allow, including in the **thematic/SDG reviews** held each year at the July session of the HLPF; and

- Advocacy with governments to shape the Ministerial Declaration adopted each year through intergovernmental negotiations leading up to the July session of the HLPF.

As part of its role as the global hub for review of the SDGs, the HLPF also serves to gather the results of the range of national, regional, international and thematic

<sup>263</sup> Amnesty International. p. 33.

<sup>264</sup> White Ribbon. p. 21.

<sup>265</sup> DG DEVCO. 2016.

<sup>266</sup> Espey et al. (2015). p. 18. DIE. p. 21.

<sup>267</sup> UN (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, para. 84.



processes, mechanisms and institutions that have the potential to contribute to the follow-up and review. Thus, civil society actors can influence the Forum's discussions and, by extension, the accountability of their own government, by contributing to processes that feed into the HLPF, such as:

- Regional commissions' dialogues that serve as preparation for the HLPF sessions (see Chapter 17 for more information on regional processes);
- Expert Group Meetings on the specific SDGs under review each year; and
- Contributing to events on HLPF margins that feed informally into governments' discussions on SDG progress.

CSOs can also utilize the HLPF for forming partnerships and alliances with the thousands of civil society representatives and other actors gathered at HLPF meetings, to strengthen advocacy and accountability at home.

Civil society participation in meetings of the HLPF is facilitated by the Outreach and Partnerships Branch in the Division for Sustainable Development Goals, which is part of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

Currently, the Forum's provisions for accountability of national governments are considered relatively weak: national reporting is voluntary, the interactive discussion on each VNR is very brief and has not met the substantive standards of other accountability processes in the UN system, and space for civil society participation in many aspects of the Forum is limited and not considered adequate for ensuring meaningful contributions. In addition, the technical preparations for the Forum are not linked to its high-level discussions in such a way to ensure their findings and inputs are addressed. As UN Women has noted, the UN General Assembly's review of the HLPF, which is expected to begin in early 2020, could provide an opportunity to strengthen its role as an accountability mechanism.<sup>268</sup>

### Key agreements on the HLPF

- UNGA resolution 67/290 agreed in July 2013, on the

**Format and organizational aspects** of the high-level political forum on sustainable development,' which calls on the Forum to ensure a dedicated role for civil society and space to engage;

- The 2030 Agenda itself, titled, 'Transforming our World,' adopted in September 2015, which sets out **several commitments** on follow-up and review through national, regional and global processes; and
- UNGA resolution 70/299 agreed in July 2016, detailing **additional features** of the follow-up and review architecture for the 2030 Agenda.

### Thematic and SDG-specific Forums and Other Opportunities

CSOs can consider engaging in thematic accountability mechanisms and opportunities for SDG accountability.

For example, the UN has bodies and forums that review progress in specific areas addressed by the SDGs, including: the **World Education Forum**, the **World Health Assembly**, the **International Labour Conference**, the **Committee on World Food Security** and the **Human Rights Council (HRC)**.<sup>269</sup> These bodies and forums can be utilized for Goal-specific approaches to SDG implementation. For example, the **NPOA** program of action on civil arms, which requires countries to report every two years, can be used by CSOs to raise awareness on arms control. Other mechanisms, such as those that focus on anti-corruption, can be useful in relation to SDG 16.

There are also specific accountability frameworks for various sub-sectors and/or themes of development cooperation, such as the **IHP+ Global Compact** for the health sector and the **New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States**.<sup>270</sup> In relation to water, in 2017, **End Water Poverty (EWP)** and its members and partners (Watershed Programme, Coalition Eau and WSSCC) agreed to conduct an in-depth, inclusive analysis and produce a comprehensive report on country-level accountability mechanisms, assessing their strengths, limitations and effectiveness. This report was then launched prior to the 2018 HLPF with the aim of

<sup>268</sup> UN Women, p. 39.

<sup>269</sup> See A/70/684: page/para? 46.

<sup>270</sup> DIE, p. 23

strengthening and building the capacity of national CSOs when advocating for improved accountability mechanisms. The goal was to have a much-needed conversation at the country level between national governments and other relevant stakeholders. This aimed to improve existing accountability mechanisms, ultimately speeding up the delivery of safely managed services for the most marginalized and vulnerable people.

CSOs may also look to **WASHwatch** for another example of a thematic approach to SDG accountability. WASHwatch is an online monitoring platform that increases monitoring and accountability towards the achievement of SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation). It provides an easily accessible information hub for the WASH sector that encourages greater focus on monitoring and accountability. Through collaborative efforts, this platform provides information on institutional frameworks, commitments, budgets, access figures and coordination mechanisms in the WASH sector, enabling monitoring progress at the global, regional and national levels.<sup>271</sup>

Other thematic opportunities include bodies such as the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**, a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. As of early 2016, 69 countries that are part of the OGP submit biannual Action Plans, developed in consultation with national civil society. In the five years since its inception, OGP Action Plans have emerged as a proven mechanism to get time-bound, independently monitored commitments from governments on policy reform towards many SDG 16 related issues. Many CSOs are already using the OGP platform to advance their policy priorities related to the SDGs.<sup>272</sup>

This is by no means an exhaustive list of thematic and Goal-specific approaches to SDG monitoring and accountability, and CSOs seeking to engage in these opportunities should explore other accountability mechanisms—specifically ones in the development cooperation space, such as the **Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)**, the **Global Partnership for**

**Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)**, and the **Development Assistance Committee (DAC)** of the OECD.

Beyond regional, global and thematic bodies and forums, there remain other accountability mechanisms and opportunities for CSOs to advance SDG accountability, including:

- **HLPF Partnership Exchange**, which provides a forum for national governments and civil society to share experience and expertise in the design and implementation of partnerships that will contribute to achieving the SDGs;
- **Partnerships for SDGs** online platform, which contains the multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments being profiled at the HLPF Partnership Exchange. CSOs can sign up for access to the database and use it to submit progress reports to the HLPF;
- **Partners for Review**, a transnational, multi-stakeholder network for a robust review process of the 2030 Agenda. The network facilitates dialogue and peer learning on challenges, provides space to explore best practices and lessons learned, mobilizes knowledge and shares expertise on new and emerging issues related to national monitoring and review;
- **Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data**, which helps stakeholders across countries and sectors harness the data revolution for sustainable development, using this new knowledge to improve lives and protect the planet. The network includes governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, academic institutions, foundations, statistics agencies and other data communities;
- **SDG National Reporting Initiative**, which facilitates greater information-sharing for reporting on the SDGs between international, regional and local communities.
- **Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA)**, a World Bank initiative focused on funding and knowledge; and
- **G20**, which presents a yearly SDG Accountability Report on its development policy agenda.

271 CESR/UN Women. p. 26

272 TAP Network. Toolkit, p. 32; Open Government Partnership. <http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/10/open-government-partnership-achieving-sustainable-development-goals-through>

# Conclusion

We hope that the *SDG Accountability Handbook* provides helpful tips and guidance on a wide range of issues that you can practically utilize in your own approaches to holding your governments accountable to the SDGs between now and 2030. The broad scope of information provided on such a wide range of topics, approaches and strategies should make it abundantly clear: much work remains to ensure that national governments are accountable to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs between now and 2030. However, it is also clear that civil society and stakeholder engagement and action on these fronts is as important as ever, particularly as we approach a critical moment in today's world that has seen disturbing trends of ever-shrinking civic space, and increasingly opaque approaches to governance on many fronts.

While there is never a one-size-fits-all approach to holding governments accountable to the SDGs and other related commitments, we hope that this Handbook provides a strong foundation for your work to do just that. Whether you're a seasoned and well-connected organi-

zation around issues of accountability in your own contexts, or a grassroots-based organization or individual looking to begin holding your government accountable for the SDGs, it is our hope that the content provided in the Handbook will be useful in framing your approaches and strategies.

Finally, we hope that you'll see this *SDG Accountability Handbook* as a living, breathing resource, and we'll endeavour to update it regularly to ensure that it always provides the most up-to-date and relevant approaches and information as we progress towards the delivery date of the SDGs in 2030.

To that end, we strongly welcome and encourage you to share any additional content, case studies, reports and other helpful links to helping foster accountability for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs with us – whether this information relates to the “approaches to accountability” outlined in the Handbook currently, or new and innovative approaches that you think could be showcased in the Handbook going forward.

*For more information, and to share your experiences, content, case studies or more with the TAP Network, visit our website at [www.SDGAccountability.org](http://www.SDGAccountability.org).*



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