

# EMPOWERING Civil Society for National Reporting and Action on SDG16

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INSTITUTIONS



A report by:



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Asia Development Alliance



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# **“Empowering Civil Society for National Reporting and Action on SDG16”**

*A report by the:*

*[Transparency, Accountability & Participation \(TAP\) Network,](#)*

*[FORUS,](#)*

*[Asia Development Alliance,](#)*

*And*

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Additionally, the TAP Network hosted an online consultation promoted amongst civil society networks, as well as in-person consultation during the Rome Conference Civil Society Day on 26 May 2019, just prior to the Rome SDG16 Conference. Out of these deliberations came the “Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+” (Rome Declaration), which is referenced in this report. Thank you to all who contributed to this Declaration.

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## Special Message from Irene Khan, Director-General, International Development Law Organization



It was a great pleasure and an enriching experience for IDLO to co-host the Civil Society Day with the TAP Network on the eve of the SDG16 Conference, co-organized by UN DESA and IDLO with the Italian government in Rome, as part of the preparations for HLPF 2019.

The Rome Conference, and the strong attention and interest that it generated across regions, served as yet another compelling reminder that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and in particular SDG16 with its powerful call for peaceful, just and inclusive societies, represent a landmark achievement in multilateralism. Civil society played a key role in making SDG16 an integral part of the 2030 Agenda. They now have an even more important role to play in supporting implementation and ensuring accountability for the achievement of SDG16, and the 2030 Agenda more broadly.

Increased fragility and conflict, negative impacts of climate change, slowing economic growth, rising inequalities, growing intolerance, and frequent attacks on international norms and human rights are threatening the momentum towards equitable and sustainable development. While these factors affect all SDGs, they pose particularly serious challenges to SDG16, given its lofty targets.

Progress on SDG16 has been slow and uneven, even retrogressive in some places. It is clear that the targets of SDG16 will not be met by 2030 unless there is much greater effort by all. SDG16 is widely recognized for its cross-cutting value across the 2030 Agenda. Failing on SDG16 may therefore also impact negatively on the achievement of other Goals.

If we are to achieve SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda, national action and global partnerships are critical – especially through the enhanced engagement of civil society, human rights and justice defenders, and citizens themselves.

For this reason, I welcome the “Empowering Civil Society for Monitoring and Action on SDG16” report, by the Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network, the Asia Development Alliance, and Forus. This resource showcases the civil society stakeholders’ efforts to implement and monitor SDG16 on the ground, and highlights the challenges, needs, and opportunities for national and local actions and accountability at all levels.

I encourage states and other actors to draw from the best practices and lessons learned by civil society, and in doing so strengthen their accountability and commitments to the 2030 Agenda, as well as expand the space for civil society action and partnership. IDLO looks forward to strengthening its collaboration with civil society, governments, the UN and other partners. We must work together with renewed sense of urgency and robust accountability to deliver the Agenda's promise to the world's people.

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# Executive Summary

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the focus of the international community turned to ensuring robust monitoring and accountability for these commitments at all levels – including the global, regional, and national levels. While global processes around the 2030 Agenda to date have seen unprecedented levels of engagement by civil society, a significant gap still remains in overall awareness and action from states and other stakeholders on the SDGs. This is particularly true at the national level, where action and follow-up by civil society with their governments will be most critical, particularly in regard to SDG16 on peaceful, just, and inclusive Societies. To support accountability for the 2030 Agenda, civil society can also play a key role by producing SDG “spotlight reports” and taking the lead on other monitoring efforts, which can be an important tool for highlighting progress towards the SDGs through the perspectives of civil society and citizens themselves.

This "Empowering Civil Society for Monitoring and Action on SDG16" report (Empowering Civil Society report) — published in partnership by the Asia Development Alliance (ADA), Forus, and the Transparency, Accountability, and Participation (TAP) Network, with contributions from CIVICUS, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), Namati, Saferworld, and Transparency International (TI)—features a compilation of national civil society case studies and civil society spotlight reports on SDG16. It provides analysis of a range of approaches and methodologies utilized by civil society for implementation and monitoring of SDG16 by civil society, specifically with regards to drafting and disseminating of spotlight reports. The report also examines gaps, challenges, and opportunities for robust accountability at all levels, and provides key recommendations for enhancing civil society monitoring and action going forward.

The report is divided into four distinct sections that showcase ongoing civil society work to implement and monitor SDG16, and also provide analysis and policy recommendations to help improve action around SDG16 in 2019 and beyond.

The first section, “Supporting Civil Society Spotlight Reporting for SDG16,” compiles approaches and methodologies for SDG16 spotlight reporting, with pieces contributed by the TAP Network, Saferworld, Transparency International, Global Forum for Media Development, and CIVICUS. In addition, this section features a comprehensive analysis of these reporting methodologies and recommendations for improving this approach to monitoring on SDG16 going forward. The key findings from this section suggest that the UN and Member States must take into account non-governmental data sources in all their evaluations of progress towards SDG16. Furthermore, an official forum needs to be created where the findings of these reports can be collected and analyzed, and a mechanism established to hold governments accountable where gaps and challenges are found.

The second section of “Empowering Civil Society” showcases national-level civil society case studies, including 11 case studies from Forus and ADA, more than 80 civil society commitments for accelerated action around SDG16 from the TAP Network, 14 national civil society SDG16 workshops organized by CSPPS and the TAP Network, case studies on the localization of SDG16 from Saferworld, and additional case studies on specific thematic issues of SDG16 from Namati and GPPAC.

Using the findings from the previous sections on SDG16 spotlight reporting and national civil society case studies, as well as analysis of the context of SDG16+ outlined in the Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+ (Rome Declaration), the third section of this report provides an analysis of the challenges, gaps and opportunities around SDG16.

As stated in the Rome Declaration, the 2030 Agenda was envisioned to bring benefits to all people, including women, children, young people, and the most vulnerable and marginalized, by ensuring basic freedoms and human rights. Today, however, the world is behind schedule on achieving this vision - on leaving no one behind and implementing the commitments to build a more peaceful, just, and inclusive society. In fact, the world faces the pressing reality that, in many countries and communities, progress around SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda is backsliding. Addressing the underlying causes of conflict, insecurity, and systemic injustice is best achieved through long-term, upstream investments and early action to address marginalization and inequalities, promoting inclusion, and supporting economic and human development.

The analysis of trends from the case studies of the “Empowering Civil Society” report is divided according to contributing partner. Forus summarizes broad trends emerging from the 11 national case studies around the role of civil society in monitoring and implementing SDG16. These trends include: impact of national contexts; lack of cross-cutting national SDG implementation plans and national oversight bodies; insufficient indicators and lack of disaggregated data; limited coordination between CSOs themselves and between CSOs and other stakeholders; and closing civic space.

The TAP Network, in analyzing civil society commitments to SDG16+, provides highlights around those commitments already collected, specifically with regard to the number of commitments made to date and thematic focuses of these pledges, as well as the key commitment gaps, challenges, and needs for SDG16 civil society. These include the need to strengthen civil society’s SDG16 commitments, increase the number of SDG16 commitments, establish a formal platform to collect, showcase, and review commitments, and finally, further national capacity building support for civil society and other stakeholders.

CSPPS’ workshop analysis notes lessons learned, including: VNR consultation activities can mark a starting point for improved dialogue and coordination; know your added value and shine a light on it; lack of VNR experience can be palliated by early preparation and organization; context differs, which is why it matters; the quality of inclusion and participation matters, but so does communication; next to securing financial support from donors, it is key to include CSPPS’s local delegations as fully fledged stakeholders in the process; civil society understands the opportunity provided by the VNR process and wants to do more; and whenever possible, open up the VNR workshop planning process to other local partners outside of usual partners, and vice versa.

Saferworld’s localization of SDG16 analysis focuses on next steps for catalyzing and supporting locally-led implementation of SDG16, including raising awareness, asking people what they want, mobilizing new partnerships and SDG16+ champions, finding new entry points for action, bridging local and global levels, and consolidating collaboration. Namati’s analysis of its case studies finds that achieving justice for all requires: ensuring effective inclusion of civil society and grassroots justice defenders in SDG16 planning, budgeting, and implementation processes; smart investing in extending access to justice via analyzing and understanding the range of justice issues in a given country; passing of effective laws and policies to increase protection of grassroots justice defenders; and civil society collaboration and support for those working at the grassroots level with tools and resources for action on SDG16 implementation. Finally, GPPAC’s analysis discusses the main challenges faced in the process of CSO reporting, which include security, time constraints for data collection, and lack of involvement in the official VNR processes.

The fourth and concluding section of “Empowering Civil Society” outlines key policy recommendations on SDG16+, coming both from this report as well as from the Rome Declaration. These recommendations are divided between the national level and global level. At the national level,

this section calls for the creation of a formal space for CSO spotlight reporting, supporting additional research, improving coordination and a clear vision for how parallel reports can most effectively contribute to the attainment of the SDGs, inclusive processes for developing a report collectively, early development of reports, and support for further data collection.

Recommendations for accelerating national action and implementation around SDG16+ include: the establishment of a formal platform to collect, showcase, and review commitments; specific improvements in the areas of governance, creating enabling environment, and integrating human rights norms; improved data collection, analysis, and use; better public access to information; bottom-up approaches; evaluations of civil society's "value offer"; recognition and support by governments of "Partnerships for Knowledge"; further national capacity building and awareness raising support for civil society and other stakeholder; greater awareness, inclusion, and active participation; and finally more coordinated and integrated implementation.

The report concludes with broader global recommendations for improving the overall implementation and monitoring of SDG16+, summarized from the "Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+" (Rome Declaration). Between now and the next time SDG16 is reviewed, civil society expects to see progress in the following seven areas:

1. We must implement SDG16+ in an integrated manner;
2. We must take a people-centered approach;
3. We call on all to promote inclusive partnerships;
4. We need to strengthen data, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms;
5. We must protect civil society and expand civic space;
6. We need increased capacity building for implementation; and
7. Finally, we must scale up commitments.

**This section closes with a broad call-to-action, noting that civil society is ready** to: raise awareness; galvanize commitments; collaborate; track progress; and engage with and strengthen communities - especially those furthest behind.

The "***Empowering Civil Society for Monitoring and Action on SDG16***" report will launch at a side event during the July 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York to coincide with the official thematic review of SDG16. This side event, scheduled for Friday, 12 July from 9:30am-12:30pm at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the UN, will feature an interactive session where colleagues can share national SDG16 implementation and monitoring experiences and present their own civil society spotlight reports

## Introduction

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the focus of the international community turned to ensuring robust monitoring and accountability for these commitments at all levels – including the global, regional and national levels. While global processes around the 2030 Agenda to date have seen unprecedented levels of engagement by civil society, a significant gap still remains in overall awareness and action from states and other stakeholders on the SDGs. This is particularly true at the national level, where action and follow-up by civil society with their governments will be most critical, particularly in regard to SDG16 on peaceful, just and inclusive Societies. To support accountability for the 2030 Agenda, civil society can also play a key role by producing SDG “spotlight reports” and taking the lead on other monitoring efforts, which can be an important tool for highlighting progress towards the SDGs through the perspectives of civil society and citizens themselves.

The "Empowering Civil Society for Monitoring and Action on SDG16" report (Empowering Civil Society report) — published in partnership by the Asia Development Alliance (ADA); Forus; and the Transparency, Accountability, and Participation (TAP) Network, with contributions from CIVICUS, Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), Namati, Saferworld, and Transparency International (TI) — features a compilation of national civil society case studies and civil society spotlight reports on SDG16. The report provides analysis of the various approaches and methodologies utilized by civil society for implementation and monitoring of SDG16 by civil society, specifically with regards to drafting and disseminating of spotlight reports. It also examines gaps, challenges, and opportunities for robust accountability at all levels, and provides key recommendations for enhancing civil society monitoring and action going forward.

Our aim for this report is for it to serve as a practical resource and policy guide for civil society and other stakeholders working around SDG16. Its chapters can be read together or utilized as stand-alone tools.

# Supporting Civil Society Spotlight Reporting for SDG16: *Compilation and Analysis of Approaches and Methodologies to Civil Society SDG16 Spotlight Reporting*



## **TAP Network's Guidelines and Methodologies for Civil Society Spotlight Reporting on the SDGs**

You can find a full version of the TAP Network's Guidelines and Methodologies for Civil Society Spotlight Reporting on the SDGs at [www.tapnetwork2030.org/sdg16reporting](http://www.tapnetwork2030.org/sdg16reporting)

Below you will find an outline produced by the TAP Network for any civil society stakeholder to consider utilizing when putting together a civil society spotlight report on SDG implementation in your country. Additionally, you will find more detailed guidance for drafting each section of a spotlight report, including key questions consider answering and other relevant information to steer you through this drafting process.

### **TAP Network Proposed Outline for SDG Civil Society Spotlight Reports**

- 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

## Summary of Guidance for Chapters of SDG16 Civil Society Spotlight Reports

### Executive Summary:

The executive summary should present a synthesis of your most important findings and recommendations. It should mention that the report provides an independent account of the government's progress towards certain SDG16 targets, include a short explanation of SDG process so far in your country, and provide the main findings from the report itself. The executive summary should also summarize the key recommendations that the spotlight report outlines for spurring additional progress on SDG16-related issues. You can also highlight issues that you deem most important given the context in your country and the work of your organization. It may be relevant to note key challenges related to SDG work in your country, and ways to overcome them.

### Introduction:

This section should include one to two paragraphs to summarize what will be discussed under this section. Then, the introduction should provide an assessment of frameworks, including constitutional, legal and legislative frameworks and the policies that have been formally established within your country. Finally, you should highlight challenges and provide recommendations.

Based on the assessment of the legal and legislative framework and policies in your country, it is important to draw out some key questions and challenges for your government to continue to address in order to make progress on these issues. The challenges should be followed by recommendations on what is needed in your country to move progress forward on the issues covered in the spotlight report.

The assessment of the current state of legal and legislative frameworks and policies, combined with the report's next section on what your government needs to do to achieve progress, can be used as a "gap analysis" for further advocacy work.

### Key Questions:

- 1) Which government body or bodies are in charge of the national SDG implementation process?
- 2) Has your country's current political leadership made public declarations about the issues covered in your spotlight report in the past two years?
- 3) Have there been high-level commitments by the current administration to strengthen the legal framework, policies or institutions that are relevant to your report?
- 4) Have there been significant reforms or advances in the fight on your issues in the past two years?
- 5) Is there an enabling space for civil society in monitoring the implementation and the commitment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly at the grassroots level?

### Review of Implementation:

This section should also begin with a brief introduction. Next, you should provide an assessment of progress highlighting some of the important issues related to implementation of laws and policies in your country. For this, it is important to consider an overarching analysis of the entire system of implementation in a country and to compare your analysis with what your government has reported through its latest Voluntary National Review (VNR), if it has conducted one. While some degree of subjective analysis on implementation is appropriate and inevitable for these reports, it is critical that they be founded on and supported by robust and verifiable indicators and data sources, as well as non-official data sources. Finally, this section should cover challenges and recommendations, including where your government currently stands with regard to SDG implementation and what it needs to do to achieve progress on certain issues. To further this, it might be useful to identify what kinds of gaps exist.

*Key Questions:*

- 1) What is the current status of SDG process in your country?
- 2) 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?
- 3) Has the government encountered any unanticipated obstacles in making progress on your issues? How have they worked to overcome these challenges?
- 4) Has the government developed an SDG/2030 Agenda implementation plan for the national level?
- 5) Have national SDG implementation plans been developed in an open and inclusive way?
- 6) Are there any important issues which are omitted or not adequately addressed in the government's VNR?

*Review of International Commitments (if applicable):*

This section should begin with an assessment of progress, where you can consider if your country has joined various international conventions/initiatives and the role it has played in these bodies. This section's analysis should be very brief, unless they have played a major role in initiating or expanding this international work. After this, you should discuss challenges and recommendations for upholding international commitments.

*Civil Society Participation in SDG Implementation / Follow-up:*

This is the final section, and it should begin with an assessment of civil society space around SDG16, and in general. The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes the role of civil society in helping spur implementation of the SDGs, and governments have committed to conduct regular "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent" reviews of progress. As such, the 2030 Agenda outlines a list of guiding principles for follow-up and review by governments and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), which can form the basis for your assessment of national follow-up and review processes.

The Agenda also calls upon all stakeholders to "report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda." Consequently, you may consider including information regarding your own organization's contributions.

The section should conclude with a challenges and recommendations. Based on the above review of civil society space in your country around the SDGs, it is important to draw out some key questions and challenges for your government to continue to address in order to open more space for civil society. Then, based on these challenges, your report should provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to create and open additional spaces for civil society and civic engagement.

*Key Questions:*

- 1) Does civil society have the opportunity to provide input to the SDG process?
- 2) Has your government set national-level indicators to track its progress on and contributions to the SDGs? And if so, has civil society been able to provide and contribute to this national indicator process?
- 3) Have there been discussions between civil society and the government on how SDG targets will fit into implementation of the national SDG plan?
- 4) Are there any entry points for your government to formally consider civil society reports, assessments and recommendations regarding SDG progress ?
- 5) Have there been legislative amendments or policies formulated that are in line with the SDGs at the national level?

**Saferworld's Enhancing accountability for peaceful, just and inclusive societies:  
Practical guidance for civil society reporting on SDG16+**

Saferworld's briefing provides practical guidance for CSOs – and those supporting them – to develop independent reports on progress towards the broader vision of the goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies, referred to as SDG16+.

Saferworld sets out guidance on both the *process* of developing a CSO report, and on a *structure* for the report. The guidance should not be taken as a blueprint, but should instead be adapted to the particular context of the country concerned.

**Process for Developing a CSO Report on SDG16+**

Developed in collaboration with national civil society partners in East Africa, Saferworld's *Process for CSO reporting on SDG16+* outlines a series of steps to develop a CSO report that is inclusive and comprehensive, and which complements other reporting processes. It recommends 16 steps, including:

- **Form core group/coalition to coordinate data-collection and report-writing**, which helps ensure wider representation, increased capacity and solidarity;
- **Agree purpose of report**, i.e. whether it is intended to contribute to, complement, or shadow a national government report;
- **Identify priority SDG16+ targets for the specific context** based on a consultative process;
- **Decide which indicators are most useful**, considering whether the official global SDG indicators are appropriate, whether complementary indicators are helpful, whether additional context-specific indicators are necessary, and whether national development plans already have relevant indicators;
- **Identify existing data sets and any additional data sources needed**, and consider working with government national statistic offices to access correct data, and whether the core group or partners have access to their own informal data;
- **Consult with civil society at national and sub-national levels for a more inclusive process**, to engage CSOs working on SDG16+ issues across the country to encourage their engagement and input;
- **Reach out to government and UN**, to provide information about the forthcoming report;
- **Organize "validation" sessions with CSOs consulted earlier in process**, to ensure report represents their inputs;
- **Present advance findings to government**, where appropriate and feasible, and engage them in discussion about how to address the key findings; and
- **Organize national and global launches of report**, to share report with national CSOs, government, UN and donors (national launch) and with wider UN community and feed into official SDG review process, if possible (global launch).

## Structure of CSO Reports on SDG16+

Saferworld's framework is intended to provide a template for structuring civil society reports. Like VNRs, civil society reporting should focus on two areas: assessing *progress* in delivering specific SDG targets, and assessing the *process* around setting, and delivering on, sustainable development priorities at a national level. In contexts where data for SDG16+ indicators is missing or hard to access, or where SDG16+ implementation efforts are lagging, analysis of the national processes relating to the prioritization of targets, implementation, monitoring and reporting provide an important insight into overall accountability.

### Section A: Process

This section of the civil society report can cover one or more of the following areas.

1. **Track government's record on reporting:** Summarize the country's previous reporting on international frameworks – including but not limited to the 2030 Agenda;
2. **Shared ownership:** Review the level of engagement and inclusion of government departments and ministries, Parliament, civil society, private sector, and others. How were these groups engaged? Was it meaningful and did it have an impact?
3. **Alignment:** Evaluate whether SDG16+ has been incorporated into national development plans, vision documents, policies, legislation, or budgeting processes;
4. **Official strategy, structures and capacities for SDG16+:** Review official government mechanisms for coordination around SDG16+, capacities for implementation, and structures for data gathering and analysis; and
5. **Civil society strategy, structures and capacities for SDG16+:** Review unofficial, non-governmental coordination mechanisms around SDG16+, capacities for implementation, and structures for data gathering and analysis.

### Section B: Content

This section covers the actual progress made towards achieving identified targets, and can address:

1. **Priority SDG16+ targets:** Acknowledge that focusing a report on all SDG16+ targets is an unrealistic undertaking, and present a clear rationale for how the prioritized targets were selected;
2. **Indicators for selected SDG16+ targets:** Explain the rationale for the selection of indicators, whether global or nationally-specific. Where appropriate, identify quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring that data is collected using rigorous and professional methods. Acknowledge data gaps and challenges if appropriate; and
3. **Review of progress:** Refer precisely to sources of data – whether official or third-party data. Define any available baselines, or acknowledge the lack of accurate baseline if none exists. Visually present data in accessible form. Annexes can be used if data presentation is extensive. Ensure data analysis focuses on improvements or shortcomings from previous reporting (official VNRs or UN reports on development progress).

### **In Practice**

Saferworld's '*Practical guidance for civil society reporting on SDG16+*' has been used by civil society actors in a number of countries in East Africa, informing at least two CSO reports to be presented at the July 2019 session of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The experience thus far highlights:

- **The benefits of an inclusive process:** The process of developing a report collectively has contributed to knowledge exchange and solidarity across the disparate community of CSOs working on SDG16+ issues;
- **The importance of starting on the report early:** Ideally, the process of developing a CSO/spotlight report begins nine months before the HLPF; and
- **Data collection is the most challenging aspect:** Limited data-collection capacities and/or insecure contexts create difficulty in gathering data; but another cause is that some organizations, especially international agencies, have been unwilling to share data or statistics.

## Transparency International's Methodologies and Shadow Reporting tools

### Context for TI's Methodology

Without headway on SDG16 on peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, any progress towards the other SDGs is likely to be fragmentary, short-lived and volatile. In fact, given the well-established links between corruption and lower levels of peace, justice and equality, anti-corruption efforts must be embedded at the heart of 2030 Agenda.

Since the 2030 Agenda was adopted in 2015, Transparency International (TI) has sought to fulfill the mandate for civil society to play a “pivotal role” in the achievement of the SDGs. <sup>1</sup>

The centrepiece of TI's efforts has been its SDG16 parallel reporting initiative, which responds to three critical weaknesses with the official monitoring framework: the multi-dimensional nature of targets, data availability and the perceived credibility (or lack of credibility) of data generated by government agencies.

First, the official selection of indicators does not cover the full ambition of the targets, which often refer to broad, multifaceted concepts. For instance, while SDG target 16.5 refers to a substantial reduction in corruption and bribery “in all their forms,” the approved global indicators measure only bribery. Likewise, SDG target 16.4 does not include indicators related to asset recovery or organized crime.

Second, many of the SDG16 indicators rely on data that is not regularly or reliably produced across multiple countries. Finally, the reliability and credibility of official data related to corruption may be open to question given that these are politically sensitive targets that require governments to assess their own efficacy.

TI thus wholeheartedly agrees with other assessments by both the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Community of Democracies that official indicator set does not fully encompass the letter or spirit of the targets under SDG16.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the official monitoring framework does not explicitly build on the knowledge and experience of non-state actors.

### Research Questionnaire and Three-Part Assessment

To address these concerns, in 2017 TI developed a tool to support its national chapters to produce supplementary, independent and credible data able to provide a more comprehensive picture of national progress towards four SDG targets related to corruption: SDG targets 16.4, 16.5, 16.6 and 16.10. Measuring progress of these targets is crucial to capture progress towards the intended outcome as well as to grasp the destructive effect of corruption across the entire 2030 Agenda.

The methodology accounts for the shortcomings of the official indicator set by taking a much broader approach, designed to monitor governmental progress in improving the framework conditions and safeguards needed to curb corruption. To do so, the tool (in the form of a research questionnaire) requires participating TI chapters to collect

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 79 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.community-democracies.org/app/uploads/2016/10/COD-SDG16-TARGETS.pdf>

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/the-indicators-we-want.html>

data on a range of 17 policy issues related to corruption, ranging from anti-money laundering to political finance, and from public procurement to access to information.

Researchers from TI chapters evaluate each policy area against three elements: a scored assessment of the *de jure* legal and institutional framework;<sup>3</sup> a qualitative appraisal of the country's *de facto* efforts to tackle corruption; and with reference to established indices and ratings produced by other CSOs and international organizations. The assessments also include data and insights collected by TI's Corruption Perceptions Index and Global Corruption Barometer. This tool is designed to elicit both data and policy recommendations that can be used to inform anti-corruption efforts. In doing so, CSOs can help to improve implementation of the entire SDG framework.

### Putting the Tool into Practice

The exercise outlined above has strengthened participating chapters' ability to conduct SDG-related advocacy by:

- providing a baseline assessment of a country's anti-corruption framework, which can be used as a benchmark to monitor progress towards the 2030 targets;
- monitoring alternative corruption indicators and proxies that have not been officially selected by government but are relevant to SDG implementation;
- producing findings and policy recommendations that can be used to scrutinise official reports such as the VNRs, in order to call attention to inaccuracies, omissions, or weaknesses.

In total, 42 TI chapters have so far employed the tool to collect data on corruption-relevant aspects of SDG16 in a way that goes beyond the narrow understanding of corruption captured by the official global indicators. Typically, chapters have used the findings from the research questionnaire to inform their own advocacy strategies, raise awareness of the pernicious impact of corruption, and exert pressure on their national governments to meet the SDG16 targets.

Moreover, many chapters have presented the key findings and policy recommendations in narrative reports at successive editions of the HLPF to complement their governments' official VNRs. At the regional level in Latin America and West Africa, the tool has been used to benchmark anti-corruption frameworks and has led to deeper collaboration between TI chapters.

Feedback from participating TI chapters has been overwhelmingly positive, as chapters have noted that it is a useful instrument to expose key shortcomings and weaknesses in national anti-corruption efforts, and that it lends itself to evidence-based advocacy. On the other hand, the broad scope of the questionnaire can limit the tool's ability to be used to conduct in-depth assessments of a given policy issue.

In addition, the 150-page questionnaire has presented a challenge to chapters with limited research or resourcing capacity. In response to this challenge, the research team at the TI Secretariat has provided support to country researchers completing the questionnaire. Additional research support is desirable in order to guarantee the quality of the research.

In terms of advocacy outcomes and policy impact, improved coordination and a clear vision for how spotlight reports can most effectively contribute to the attainment of the SDGs will play a critical role in maximising their potential.

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<sup>3</sup> Scorecards were produced to visualise the strength of a country's anti-corruption framework across the four SDG16 targets, which proved to be a useful media strategy. It is worth emphasising, however, that the scores merely assess whether a given country's legislative and institutional anti-corruption framework is in line with international best practice and do not assess compliance with the legislative framework or the effectiveness of its implementation.

## Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) Spotlight Reports on SDG Target 16.10

SDG target 16.10 calls on all UN Member States to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.” To monitor progress on this target, there are two official UN indicators: SDG indicator 16.10.1 tracks verified cases of murders and unlawful detentions of journalists, human rights advocates and labour organizers, and SDG indicator 16.10.2 monitors the adoption and implementation of laws guaranteeing public access to official data, documents, and other information from government bodies.

The two mutually reinforcing components of SDG target 16.10 – “fundamental freedoms” and “access to information” – must be considered together in order to evaluate progress towards the Goal, both nationally and globally.

### Pilot Projects on Evaluating ATI Laws

In an effort to accelerate and evaluate progress in the area of access to information (SDG indicator 16.10.2), an international civil society coalition led by the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Deutsche Welle Akademie (DW Akademie) and Free Press Unlimited (FPU) conducted pilot projects with local partners to evaluate the implementation of access to information (ATI) laws. These were carried out in six countries, which are set to submit VNRs at the July 2019 session of the HLPF: Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia, South Africa and Tanzania.

National multi-stakeholder consultations on the state of ATI were organized to foster information-sharing and collaboration on these assessments between journalists, civil society activists, government representatives, academic researchers and media development specialists. Prior to these meetings, local partners conducted national ATI evaluations via a [methodology](#) developed by the Freedom of Information Advocates Network (FOIANet). The methodology consists of three dimensions: (1) the proactive disclosure, where a public body has adopted a proactive approach by releasing information, without anyone making a request; (2) *the institutional measures*, internal policies in each public institution to facilitate the implementation of national ATI laws; (3) the processing of requests, which evaluates the quality of responses towards information requests and compliance of public authorities to the national ATI laws. These evaluations were supported by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN agency tasked with official monitoring of progress towards SDG target 16.10.

Preliminary reflections of the resulting spotlight report have highlighted three main obstacles to ensuring the proper implementation of ATI laws:

- A notable “knowledge gap,” encompassing two dimensions: the lack of awareness among the public as well as government officials regarding the fundamental right of public access to information, and a lack of data on ATI implementation;
- The presence of cultures of secrecy within public bodies and relatively weak political will to move towards transparency; and
- The scarcity of resources and capacities, exemplified through the absence of public information officers or the non-binding status of ATI nodal agencies.

To tackle these challenges, efforts should focus on raising awareness of ATI, supported by broader data collection and the setting of a universal research agenda on ATI with corresponding methodologies.

### **Applying the Findings**

The monitoring of ATI implementation through a multi-stakeholder approach was broadly welcomed by state actors. They expressed a real interest in the methodology used to assess the state of ATI. Although ATI is not perceived as a priority, there is willingness to improve both implementation as well as monitoring.

In comparison with other development challenges, the full implementation of ATI laws – and by definition SDG target 16.10 – can be achieved with a relatively low amount of resources. In theory, governments are the sole implementers of ATI, and therefore it only requires appropriate allocation of resources and an adjustment of existing infrastructure to facilitate information requests at all levels. Furthermore, stronger ATI can propel all other development initiatives, as information is a prerequisite for good governance and improving accountability. Even though it is not widely considered a priority, the relatively low threshold for its implementation should be considered an incentive for state actors.

Accurate data on how ATI laws are experienced is a first step in this regard. To fully and accurately assess progress on SDG target 16.10, official data not only are insufficient, but often misleading. Governments can report accurately on the existence (or not) of national ATI laws; that is a matter of public record. But governments by themselves cannot be the only authority reporting on whether these laws are being fully enforced and serving the public as intended: that requires input from civil society, academic and media experts in the practical use of these ATI laws and systems in their respective countries.

Similarly, governments cannot be considered the sole definitive source of information on the work-related murders of journalists, some of whom would be considered critics of those same governments. Independent media organizations and human rights groups have more experience and far greater credibility in documenting such cases.

Without a genuinely free and safe environment for independent news media, ATI laws cannot fully serve their intended purpose of keeping the public informed. Conversely, unless governments comply with their commitments to make official data and documents available to the media and the public at large, press freedom guarantees alone will not keep the public informed. Independent media play a crucial role in raising public awareness and encouraging public participation in the 2030 Agenda, by helping to provide the necessary factual data and expert analysis that is required for global monitoring and achievement of the SDGs.

To that end, the international coalition calls on all UN Member States to support independent media, in recognition of its critical importance to the agreed international commitment to public access to information and the protection of press freedom and other fundamental freedoms in the 2030 Agenda.

### **Integrating Independent Data into Official SDG Reporting**

The coalition has achieved its initial objective of piloting a comprehensive methodology for civil society reporting on SDG target 16.10 and testing workable approaches to multi-stakeholder consultations in the process. The next phase of the project includes sharing lessons learned, coordinating national and international advocacy efforts, and working with partners to ensure that independent data sources will be integrated into official SDG reporting processes. It is clear that the 2030 Agenda needs to be considered in its entirety as a set of interlinked, mutually reinforcing objectives, rather than evaluated as a series of separate Goals. Freedom of and access to information

comprise a common denominator among all of these interlinked objectives.

Going forward, the civil society groups collaborating on SDG target 16.10 assessments call on UN Member States to account for non-governmental data sources in all their evaluations of progress towards SDG16, and not to limit their commitment to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms” to the adoption of ATI legislation without proper implementation. Independent national monitoring initiatives and methodologies are essential tools for supplementing and evaluating official government reporting on all ten targets of SDG16, as well as its overarching objective of promoting “peaceful and inclusive societies” with “access to justice for all” and “effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.”

Governments alone cannot be the primary sources and much less the sole evaluators of the quality of their own governance. Without objective, empirical reporting from all qualified sources on the status of the many ambitious objectives of 2030 Agenda – all of which require public trust, based on publicly available and reliable information – progress on the SDGs cannot be measured, much less achieved.



## CIVICUS Spotlight Reporting Methodologies/CIVICUS Monitor

Given the comprehensive nature of the 17 SDGs, most CSOs are already working towards both accomplishing and monitoring progress on these Goals in some way. Yet despite these aligned interests, most organizations' data cannot be easily used for official, government-led SDG monitoring efforts because their methodology or scope differs from the official SDG indicators' methodologies. For example, many of the SDG indicators ask for results as a proportion of the national population, which is typically a larger geographic area than most CSOs operate in.

Despite these challenges, civil society still has a major contribution to make to SDG monitoring and helping to hold decision-makers accountable to their commitments. Here, CIVICUS presents three global cases and methodologies of how these potential contributions can be realized. The first example is the CIVICUS Monitor, which collates information from a variety of academic, media and civil society sources to track changes in civic space in each country, i.e. the ability to realize freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, which directly pertain to SDG target 16.10. Then, we have examples from CIVICUS's DataShift initiative, which sees global data generated on inclusive and responsive decision-making (SDG indicator 16.7.2) through the SPEAK! Campaign, which in turn sparks further action on reaching this SDG16 target through local workshops.

### CIVICUS Monitor Methodology

Civic space is defined as the respect in policy and practice for the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression. The state has a fundamental duty to protect these rights. CIVICUS Monitor conceptualizes the conditions for civil society as the respect for these indicators and therefore, directly link to SDG target 16.10 and indicator 16.10.1.

The CIVICUS Monitor is a dynamic, online portal that tracks conditions for civil society in 196 countries. The CIVICUS Monitor combines qualitative and quantitative data generated by primary and secondary research. These inputs are split into two distinct categories: 1) the base score and 2) the live adjustment score. These sources provide a stable approximation of the current state of civic space to arrive at a dynamic rating for all assessed countries. These ratings are constantly updated through a live component, and the quality of country ratings is controlled by an independent advisory panel of experts.

The CIVICUS Monitor is one of the few tools that provides comprehensive information for all UN Member States as well as several territories.

In addition, the CIVICUS Monitor methodology is unique among international indexes as it combines several independent data sources. These sources include updated ratings from CSOs and reports from national, regional and international CSOs with relevant information on the four indicators of civic space identified above. These external analyzes are then paired with CIVICUS' own analysis to arrive at country ratings for all assessed countries and territories. Current trends are captured through the inclusion of a live component which enables the scores behind the ratings to change commensurate with political or social developments at the country level. In accordance with CIVICUS' mission, the methodology privileges information that is generated closer to the source in

an effort to reduce “distance bias”. Simply put, this means information from civil society groups on the ground is taken to be the most accurate and credible. Further, by diversifying our sources, we reduce over-reliance on any particular data source, which also enhances the stability and sustainability of the CIVICUS Monitor.

The Monitor is therefore a highly credible and easily accessible resource for CSOs to use in their SDG target 16.10 follow-up and review activities, even if they are not themselves contributing any inputs to it. For instance, its country data can be incorporated into civil society-led monitoring efforts and used to support national level advocacy. Furthermore, because of its global scope, it can also be used to highlight trends, draw regional comparisons and indicate overall levels of progress or regression on SDG16.10. This makes it a particularly powerful resource advocacy on the international stage, given the UN’s reluctance to compare the SDG performance of countries to one another.

### **DataShift Initiative Methodologies**

The DataShift initiative supports CSOs in both collecting data and acting to make positive change towards reaching more inclusive and responsive decision-making (SDG indicator 16.7.2).

According to statistical information provided by the UN’s Statistics Division, there is no globally available data for SDG indicator 16.7.2<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, DataShift teamed up with CIVICUS’ SPEAK! campaign to support CSOs to collect data on this indicator. Then, workshops were organized to help communities use the resulting SDG indicator 16.7.2 data to mobilize towards “**one next step**,” which refers to the SPEAK! Campaign described below.

### **SPEAK! Campaign**

The SPEAK! initiative created a global campaign with diverse CSOs to break down barriers in their communities. SPEAK! events around the world were coordinated to be held over the same days and brought together people with different religious, sexual health, immigration status, and political views. Working together with SPEAK! Partners from Uruguay to Uganda, CIVICUS collected around 600 responses (in English, Spanish and Arabic) from participants at events in Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

Despite the diversity of locations and events, a global trend emerged. Most participants across regions reporting having high confidence in their own ability to participate in politics, whereas few reported confidences in “having a say” in what the government did. Furthermore, most people did not see voting or political party membership as meaningful ways to participate. However, individuals provided examples of being able to engage in their local communities, including standing up for a right or preventing harm to individuals in their community. With this survey effort, CSOs were able to contribute global data to an indicator that previous had no known publicly available data.

CIVICUS also learned that individuals were well placed to act on the collected data for SDG indicator 16.7.2 data in their local communities. This involved supporting five CSOs in Latin America and Africa to convene a series of workshops on this indicator that helped participants to complete “one next step” towards increasing inclusive and responsive decision-making. The workshops saw participants ask each other questions about responsive and inclusive decision-making in their communities, to explore patterns in their collective experiences, along with challenges and possible ways to improve the situation. Then either collectively or individually, workshops decided

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<sup>4</sup> [1] Ritchie, Roser, Mispy, Ortiz-Ospina. "Measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals." SDG-Tracker.org, website (2018). Accessed on April 13, 2019 at <https://sdg-tracker.org/peace-justice>.

on “one next step” - an action that could be taken with 30 days with currently available resources. Most importantly, we followed up with participants after the 30 days to find out what had changed since the workshop.

The workshops in Latin America resulted in organizations taking the lead in the “one next step.” For example, in Chile, the Chile Transparente workshops discovered that only the government and organizations from the capital were aware of the 2030 Agenda. This meant those outside the capital were completely left out of what is supposed to be a universal initiative. One group’s “one next step” was to revise the workshop to tailor it more to organizations around the country, allowing them to more actively participate in SDG-related efforts. Furthermore, within 30 days both FUNDE from El Salvador and Chile Transparente had filmed short videos in their communities to share their stories. The videos are part of the “SDG16+ stories” initiative led by the TAP Network campaign and will be shown at the July 2019 HLPF in New York.

In Africa, the workshops had individuals making their own unique “one next step.” In South Africa, Africa Monitor’s workshops found that female youth organizations were being left out of access to local public spaces for sports team practices. A local businessman made it his “one next step” to speak to the local government and gain access for the group. Similarly, in Tanzania, when following up with individuals that had attended the Kinara for Youth Evolution workshops, individuals had taken a wide range of actions for the first time. This included attending school and council meetings, registering to vote and encouraging others to register to vote, reporting known child abuse to the police, and young people organizing to address the double problems of youth unemployment and poor waste management by gaining permission from the local government to be responsible for regular garbage collection.

These methodologies show how different approaches can use different actors, multiple data sources, and leverage other campaigns to collect data to monitor, take action to hold decision-makers to account. And by supporting organizations and individuals to find their own ways to make progress towards achieving SDG16, these approaches represent a highly practical means of increasing both awareness and action on this pivotal Goal.

## Analysis of Spotlight Reporting Methodologies and Recommendations

Civil society plays an important role in international monitoring processes through the production of independent civil society spotlight reports for SDG16. While the VNR process is the primary channel for reporting on country-level progress on the SDGs, including SDG16, and the 2030 Agenda, civil society spotlight 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 SDG16 spotlight report to challenge or provide an alternative perspective to their country's official VNR report regarding implementation of SDG16. These reports are particularly important where civil society members have little or no opportunities to engage in official VNR processes at the national level. Independent assessments shed light on how governments are involving civil society in their implementation and review of the SDGs in general, and account for the need to leave no one behind.

The scope of any spotlight report depends largely on the capacity and goals of the CSO carrying out the assessment. There is no one size-fits-all approach to reporting on SDG16 issues, and numerous templates and guidelines have been created in recent years to support CSOs in the drafting and dissemination process. The following section analyzes spotlight reporting methodologies pertaining to SDG16. It then provides recommendations for improving existing methodologies.

### *Why is civil society spotlight reporting important?*

Meaningful civil society participation in encouraging inclusive and open SDG16 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 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 spotlight reports on SDG16 implementation is a way for civil society to build a positive working relationship with governments in support of the SDGs.

In general, civil society spotlight 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 international stages—thereby showcasing the value of civil society engagement in SDG implementation and monitoring.

### *How can and should civil society spotlight reporting be used?*

Civil society spotlight reporting is one of the most important mechanism for monitoring and holding governments accountable on SDG16 implementation—yet it remains outside of official follow-up and review structures. 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 spotlight reporting is the most effective accountability mechanism to use in monitoring SDG16 implementation and, if so, to ensure that their reports are properly prepared and disseminated for maximum impact.

Below are key guidelines to consider for civil society spotlight reports for SDG16:

- **Preparation for reporting: Identifying partners, funding and project plans** – A comprehensive civil society spotlight report that monitors SDG16 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.
- **What do you want to achieve? Clarifying goals and scope** – In preparing to draft a civil society spotlight 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 organization'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 spotlight report effective with limited 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.
- **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 spotlight reports on SDG16 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 spotlight reporting, such as those created by the TAP Network, Forus, Action for Sustainable Development, and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). In addition, CSOs may find resources on human rights civil society reporting by national and/or international human rights institutions, which are useful, as the objectives, processes and audiences are similar to those of SDG16 civil society spotlight reports.
- **What can you do with it? Report dissemination** – At this time, there are no formal submission mechanisms for collecting civil society spotlight reports focused on SDG16 implementation. However, many civil society coalitions, including the TAP Network, are working to formalize collection and dissemination processes for civil society spotlight 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>5</sup> Beyond passive publication, CSOs also should make efforts to use their reporting to start dialogues and build relationships with others working on SDG16 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:

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

- *National-level actors:*
    - Governmental officials at all relevant levels and ministries, including in the executive branch, parliamentarians, local authorities and relevant agencies responsible for SDG16 implementation;
    - Non-governmental institutions and groups, including supreme audit institutions (SAIs), NHRIs, civil society groups and the media;
  - *Regional and global-level actors:*
    - UN agencies, including UN Development Programme (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 SDG16 monitoring, including International Human Right Institutions and the media.
- **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, including for SDG16. 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 spotlight 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 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 spotlight reports at official HLPF events and side events.
  - **Is the context right for a civil society report? Understanding the political climate for reporting** – CSOs thinking of creating an SDG spotlight report should be mindful of the political climate in their home countries, specifically taking into account the risks of monitoring and accountability efforts. Before undertaking reporting efforts, CSOs must assess whether 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 spotlight reporting can work with global organizations such as the TAP Network or Human Rights Watch to help analyze 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 spotlight report on SDG16 is to encourage a national government to take action, then it is key to assess the likelihood that such work will bring about change before undertaking the investment of producing a report.

### *Analysis of spotlight reporting from the experiences of contributing CSOs*

The previous sections on civil society SDG16 spotlight reporting methodologies and approaches, contributed by the TAP Network, Saferworld, Transparency International, GFMD, and CIVICUS, note a number of additional findings related to each organization’s experience with helping to develop their own reports and/or guide other CSOs through such processes.

In the experience of the TAP Network, one of the main challenges is availability of regular and reliable data for reporting. While some degree of subjective analysis on implementation is appropriate and inevitable for these

reports, TAP emphasizes that it is critical that these analyzes be founded and supported by robust and verifiable indicators and data sources, as well as non-official data sources.

Saferworld's *'Practical guidance for civil society reporting on SDG16+'* has been used by civil society actors in a number of countries in East Africa, informing at least two progress reports intended to be presented at the July session of the HLPF. The experience thus far highlights:

- The benefits of an inclusive process – the process of developing a report collectively has contributed to knowledge exchange and solidarity across the disparate community of CSOs working on SDG16+ issues;
- The importance of starting on the report early – the process of developing a CSO spotlight report should begin ideally nine months before the HLPF; and that
- Data collection is the most challenging aspect – this is partly due to limited data-collection capacities and/or insecure contexts and thus difficulty in gathering data, but also to the fact that some organizations, especially international agencies, have been unwilling to share data or statistics.

TI's efforts around SDG16 spotlight reporting have sought to respond to three critical weaknesses with the official monitoring framework: the multi-dimensional nature of targets; data availability; and the perceived credibility of data generated by government agencies. In total, 42 TI chapters have so far employed the reporting tool to collect data on corruption-relevant aspects of SDG16 in a way that goes beyond the narrow understanding of corruption captured by the official global indicators.

Feedback from participating TI chapters has been overwhelmingly positive, as chapters have noted that it is a useful instrument to expose key shortcomings and weaknesses in national anti-corruption efforts, and that it lends itself to evidence-based advocacy. On the other hand, the broad scope of the questionnaire can limit the tool's ability to be used to conduct in-depth assessments of a given policy issue. In addition, the 150-page questionnaire has presented a challenge to chapters with limited research or resourcing capacity.

While TI chapters remain steadfast in their commitment to the 2030 Agenda, additional research support is desirable in order to guarantee the quality of the research. In terms of advocacy outcomes and policy impact, improved coordination and a clear vision for how spotlight reports can most effectively contribute to the attainment of the SDGs will play a critical role in maximising their potential.

In an effort to accelerate and evaluate progress in the area of access to information (SDG indicator 16.10.2), an international civil society coalition led by the GFMD, DW Akademie and FPU conducted pilot projects with local partners to evaluate the implementation of ATI laws. These were carried out in six countries, each of which is set to present a VNR this year: Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia, South Africa and Tanzania.

Preliminary reflections of the resulting spotlight report have highlighted three main obstacles to ensuring the proper implementation of ATI laws: a notable "knowledge gap" encompassing two dimensions: the lack of awareness among the public as well as government officials regarding the fundamental right of public access to information, and a lack of data on ATI implementation; the presence of cultures of secrecy within public bodies and relatively weak political will to move towards transparency; and the scarcity of resources and capacities, exemplified through the absence of public information officers or the non-binding status of ATI nodal agencies.

As found by others, GFMD notes that to fully and accurately assess progress on SDG16, specifically SDG target 16.10, official data alone not only are insufficient, but often misleading. Going forward, the civil society groups collaborating on these SDG target 16.10 assessments call on UN Member States to take into account non-governmental data sources in all their evaluations of progress towards SDG16, and not limit their commitment to

“ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms” to the adoption of ATI legislation without proper implementation.

Finally, CIVICUS presents three global cases and methodologies of how SDG monitoring can work in practice. These methodologies show how different approaches can use different actors, multiple data sources, and leverage other campaigns to collect data to monitor, take action to hold decision-makers to account. And by supporting organizations and individuals to find their own ways to make progress towards achieving SDG16, these approaches represent a highly practical means of increasing both awareness and action on this pivotal Goal.

### *What's next? Encouraging the creation of a formal space for CSO spotlight reporting*

Going forward, UN agencies and Member States must take into account non-governmental data sources in all their evaluations of progress towards SDG16, specifically those used in civil society SDG16 spotlight reports. As noted previously, these various methodologies and approaches to civil society reporting show how different approaches can use different actors, multiple data sources, and other campaigns to collect data to monitor, take action to hold decision-makers to account.

Moreover, despite growing calls for more independent civil society spotlight reporting on SDG implementation at the national level, no official forum exists for the findings of these reports to be collected and analyzed, 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 SDG16 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 national governments' VNR delegations to the HLPF.

Finally, civil society groups, particularly at the global level, **should work to produce a joint SDG16 Spotlight Reporting template** that can be used by any civil society group, taking into account all of the varying methodologies and approaches – particularly those showcased in this report. This will not just help civil society in identifying a common reporting methodology, but it will also help ensure comparability of reports across the diverse set of countries and stakeholders putting them together. If done well, and utilized extensively by civil society partners, such a template could provide the foundation for aggregating regional or global progress towards SDG16 by compiling insights from national reports.

# Supporting Civil Society for Action on SDG16+:

## *A compilation of National Case Studies from Civil Society Networks working on SDG16+*



### Forus and ADA Case Studies from National CSO Platforms on SDG16+

#### *Introduction*

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a critically important, foundational and transversal Goal. Its effective implementation at local, national, regional, and international levels is an essential precondition for the realization of many other of the Agenda's Goals and targets. Indeed, the vision of SDG16 – the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and the building of effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels – has not yet been fully realized by any society across the world, and therefore its implementation has universal relevance.

Civil society has a key role to play in monitoring and supporting the implementation of SDG16 at a national level. However, it cannot be fully effective in doing so unless it is operating in an enabling environment and its efforts are supported by an appropriate governance architecture and relevant implementation mechanisms. The rationale for producing the 11 diverse national SDG16 case studies featured in this chapter is to provide an insight into the national realities that exist for civil society in different parts of the world, with regard to implementing this Goal and its targets.

#### **Participating organizations**

Forus is a global civil society network dedicated to promoting transformative political economic and social change to achieve a fair and sustainable world for all. Its membership comprises national development platforms from 69 different countries and regional coalitions from seven regions. The network is keenly aware of the importance of ensuring that civil society around the world engages with monitoring and implementing SDG16 at local, national, regional, and international levels. At its General Assembly in Santiago in September 2018, the membership of the Forus network mandated it to contribute to the development of a global-level SDG16 report to highlight the challenges and opportunities faced by civil society in different parts of the world when monitoring and implementing SDG16 and its targets.

The Asia Development Alliance (ADA) is regional civil society coalition that is a member of Forus. It has prioritized SDG16 in its own policy and advocacy work. ADA provides a regional space and process for policy dialogue with governments and international organizations such as the UN, financial institutions such as Asia Development Bank and other stakeholders on issues related to the 2030 Agenda, in particular the SDGs. Since ADA works on increasing civic participation and democratic influences in decision-making and policy formulation where national action planning and monitoring are concerned, SDG16 and the broader concept of SDG16+ have been priorities for the coalition and its members. ADA seeks to link SDG16 with human rights, democracy and peace in an attempt to fill the gaps and bridge the silos.

## Focus countries

This chapter presents a summary of 11 national case studies which provide valuable insights into the monitoring and implementation of SDG16 and its targets around the world. The 11 countries are Brazil, Colombia, Canada, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, Slovenia, Timor-Leste and the United Kingdom. Each case study was developed by a national civil society platform, organization or an individual in coordination with the national platform in that country and provides a brief overview of the national context in which SDG16 is being implemented, and the role that national governments and civil society have played to date in monitoring and implementation activities. Each case study also provides key national-level policy recommendations developed by Forus and ADA member organizations on ways to accelerate the implementation of SDG16.

This chapter also summarizes broader trends emerging from the diverse national case studies and makes recommendations for strengthening and enhancing the role of civil society in monitoring and implementing SDG16 and its targets at a national level.

## Key findings

- **Impact of national contexts**

A consistent finding which emerges from the 11 case studies is that civil society in these countries is proactive in trying to hold governments to account for the political commitments to implementing the 2030 Agenda at national level, and SDG16 in particular. The national case studies also highlight, however, how the meaningful and effective engagement of civil society in monitoring and implementation of this Goal depends largely on enabling national contexts.

For example, in Cambodia the case study reports that local authorities are not properly informed about SDG16, and no effective mechanism is in place to ensure inputs into the government's VNR process by diverse stakeholders. In DRC, despite having a logical and regulatory framework in place for the elaboration and legitimization of a national anti-corruption strategy for the country, corruption remains endemic. It appears that the Congolese government has done little to take advantage of SDG16 to renew its impetus on a comprehensive anti-corruption drive in the country. In Slovenia, despite significant recent progress in strengthening child protection, the country lacks a national strategic document on children's rights.

In Nigeria, internal crises and outbreaks of violence are reported to undermine the SDG agenda, including violence perpetuated by the Fulani militia, bandits and the cases of reckless killings by security forces, especially the police and its Special Anti-robbery squad (SARS). In Nepal, data is not easily available related to SDG16 and its targets, and this makes it difficult to measure progress on implementation.

In Colombia, the National Government created the Interinstitutional Commission for the Preparation and Effective Implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Objectives by Presidential Decree in February 2015. However, the case study from Colombia highlights that follow-up on compliance with the functions of the Commission, and the results and decisions emerging from the sessions and decisions taken there are not visible and publicly accessible. In Brazil the implementation of SDGs continues to suffer from budgetary cuts and austerity measures enforced in December 2016. The UK's planned departure from the European Union, on top of contemporary challenges such as the removal of legal aid, the threat from populism and impact of social media, terrorism and high-level corruption, means there is a growing risk of backsliding on the implementation of SDG16.

- **Low public awareness of SDGs & SDG16**

Several of the case studies highlight low levels of public awareness of the 2030 Agenda and SDG16 as a major hindrance to proper implementation. For example, in British Columbia, Canada, there are many promising initiatives that are related to SDG16 targets. However, its case study reports that civil society often has no awareness of and makes no connection with the SDG framework. Many Canadian CSOs seem to be pushing for implementation of SDGs as an entire framework, but on an individual Goal level, monitoring remains limited. The Canadian case study calls for capacity development for CSOs, organizations, businesses, and governments so that they can begin to align their policies, missions, and actions with SDG16.

The Cambodian case study reports that public awareness of the SDGs in general, and SDG16 in particular, is extremely low among the general public, and a vast majority of citizens have not heard of the Goals. The case study recommends that the Cambodian government allocate budget to support public sensitization programs to raise awareness of SDGs, including among public servants and the general public, especially youth. The case study submitted from Timor-Leste also recommends that CSOs are supported to raise awareness of the SDGs at the local level.

- **Lack of cross-cutting National SDG Implementation Plans & National Oversight Bodies**

The case studies make clear that the failure of many governments to develop cross-cutting national SDG implementation plans and to establish national SDG-related oversight bodies continues to impede the implementation of SDG16 in different parts of the world. The UK Government's approach to implementing the SDGs has primarily involved the incorporation of relevant Goals in the Single Departmental Plans (SDPs) of individual government departments. Its rationale is to align existing policies and programmes with the Goals and embed the targets in departmental decision-making. As no cross-cutting national implementation plan exists, it is widely recognized that this process has so far had limited success. The UK case study reports that there is a need develop an overarching and cross-cutting National Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda.

Canada is in the process of creating a national implementation strategy in 2019. It is hoped that a Road Map will be developed which will set out exactly how SDG16 and other Goals will be achieved in Canada. In Timor-Leste, although the government has been trying to align SDG implementation with the its Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030, this has been limited progress and there is no clear mechanism for implementation.

- **Insufficient indicators and lack of disaggregated data**

The case studies highlight the extent to which the implementation of SDG16 at a national level is impeded by a lack of availability of adequate data sets and the adoption by governments of an insufficient range of indicators for monitoring implementation, particularly where SDG16 is concerned. For example, in Canada, BCCIC initiated a project to visually map civil society involvement on the SDGs, particularly on SDG16, throughout the country. In the latest phase of this project BCCIC has produced a 'Movement Map' containing more than 11,500 civil society organizations that have been screened from over 30,000 organizations in total. Many have been screened for basic engagement and a focus on SDG16. The mapping methodology process was hampered by incomplete access to 2019 data on registered non-profits within each province.

By accessing a mixture of the official provincial corporate registry and reliable third-party data staff developed a classification system based on the 169 SDG targets and Canada-specific criteria informed by Statistics Canada's SDG data hub to classify organizations. To ensure reliable results from mapping and to ensure better understanding on the key gaps for SDG16, a much deeper analysis is needed. That will allow for a better grasp of civil society's involvement on SDG16, particularly those working on SDG targets 16.1, 16.2, 16.4, and 16.5 with their implications and integrated approaches that advance both sustainable development, peace and

justice. This exercise marks the first step toward deeper understanding of capacities and gaps among civil society to address causes and raise awareness across all layers of society about their role in SDG implementation. Ultimately the analysis will contribute to enhanced collaboration and coordination among diverse partners who can complement government's preparedness to achieve the SDGs on time.

In Pakistan it is reported that only 69 of the 247 global SDG indicators were selected as national priority indicators. Relevant data and baselines are available for only 50 out of 69 selected national priority indicators. Out of 21 global indicators for SDG16, only 13 were selected for Pakistan's national priority framework, and baselines and targets are set for only three indicators: namely intentional homicides (16.1.1), conflict related deaths (16.1.2), and proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence (16.1.3). The Brazilian Census is considered the largest statistics operation in Latin America and a crucial component of policy making, being the only survey conducted in all 5,570 cities in the country. The information collected supports public policy design and implementation, and dictates budget allocations from the federal to the local spheres. The budget cuts under the new government administration will damage population projections and estimates and will make it impossible to measure the housing deficit or to develop an accurate picture of poverty and income inequality. The lack of proper data will also impede the adequate decentralization of Brazil's response to the SDGs and to the implementation of SDG16.

- **Limited co-ordination between CSOs themselves & between CSOs and other stakeholders**

A consistent theme from the case studies is the weak or sometimes non-existent coordination between CSOs. For example, in the DRC civil society is attempting to engage in the process of monitoring and supporting the implementation of SDG16, but its actions are very limited due to a lack of capacity, resources and extremely low coordination of CSOs across the country. In Slovenia, the 2030 Agenda is still not embedded within various line ministries or NGOs, and 2030 Agenda issues are still addressed in silos, with cross-sectorial partnerships lacking. Individual SDG16 targets are monitored by individual NGOs (e.g. Corruption Perceptions Index), and joint and comprehensive monitoring efforts have not yet been established.

- **Closing civic space**

The growing restrictions faced by CSOs at the national level was reflected in many of the case studies. In Brazil for example, during President Bolsonaro's first months in power, journalists were blocked from meetings and the press was attacked, public information was removed from the internet, and the credibility of statistics bodies was questioned. Additionally, an [authoritarian decree](#) extinguished [700 Councils](#) dismantling key arrangements for decision-making and social control, generating insecurity for the constitutional right of participation. Criminal laws originally used to restrict [criminal organizations](#) have been used to target civil society [leaders](#), alongside the [Antiterrorism Law](#), and Brazil is considered the most dangerous place for [human rights defenders](#) and will likely remain so. During his electoral campaign, Bolsonaro vowed to [end activism](#) and in office, [authorized](#) government oversight of domestic and international NGOs.

In Colombia, it is reported that there has been a systematic weakening of the enabling environment for CSOs to exercise their social, political and development role, evidenced by a regulation that limits social and political rights (including the rights to organization, peaceful protest, access to public resources for development) and an institutional framework that limits. The official figures on the criminalization, persecution and murder of leaders of CSOs in the territories, especially those who denounce or raise their voices for the guarantee of rights, are alarming (343 leaders according to the Ombudsman's Office). In Timor-Leste, although the country has sufficient civic space for civil society participation, there have been cases reported of journalists and media being threatened. There have also been several incidents where civil society members were brutally responded to during demonstrations in front of National Parliament House.

## Promising approaches to SDG16 implementation at national level

In addition to identifying the challenges faced by CSOs involved in monitoring and implementing SDG16 at the national level, the case studies highlight several promising approaches to promoting the implementation of the SDGs and SDG16 at the national level.

### **Cambodia**

- In Cambodia, Cambodia Cooperation Committee (CCC) has conducted regional consultation workshops to collect inputs from CSOs at provincial level on SDG16 for the government's VNR report. The regional consultation workshops were conducted in three different provinces with approximately 100 participants representing CSOs from 21 provinces in Cambodia.
- In Cambodia, Transparency International and other CSOs worked with government counterparts to run a School of Governance in 2016; and CCC is hosting the self-regulated certification system on Governance and professional Practice (GPP) which promotes governance and zero tolerance for corruption within the civil society sector
- The Open Development Cambodia (ODC) is also hosting a quality development database which could generate useful information sources related to the SDGs, including SDG16.

### **Timor-Leste**

- In 2015, the VI Constitutional Government of Timor-Leste and civil society through FONGTIL signed a Memorandum of Understanding to conduct a social audit fostering transparency and accountability to enhance partnership between the government and the CSOs.

### **Nigeria**

- In Nigeria, the government has begun a process to capture the identities of minors from the age of 0 to 15 years by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC). Currently in its pilot phase, the initiative will enable every citizen, including children, to be enrolled and issued the National Identification Number (NIN). Before this initiative, the Commission only issued the NIN to citizens and legal residents aged 16 years and above.

### **Nepal**

- In Nepal, civil society has developed a CSO Civic Charter as a means of creating a binding document for self-regulation. The civic charter was prepared in very simple Nepali languages to complement SDG16 implementation. It was widely disseminated with a short orientation to all NGO Federation Nepal member organizations with guidelines for adopting its points in their own organizations.

### **Canada**

- In Canada, BCCIC initiated a project to visually map civil society involvement on the SDGs, particularly on SDG16, throughout Canada. In the latest phase of this project BCCIC has produced a 'Movement Map' containing more than 11,500 civil society organizations that have been screened from over 30,000 organizations. Many have been screened for basic engagement with the SDGs, with a focus on SDG16.
- The Peace Network's 22 members who use mediation and education to help to bridge divided communities are working in Montreal to bring together peace professionals and mediators to provide a space to build and maintain healthy relationships and make the vision of social harmony within cities a reality.

### **Pakistan**

- In Pakistan, the government has committed to aligning all annual and multi-year programs and budgets with the SDG indicators that are included in the national priority framework.
- In March 2018, the Pakistan Development Alliance carried out a country-wide assessment on 'Where Pakistan Stands on SDGs.' The assessment shares the accomplishments, opportunities, gaps, challenges, recommendations, and way forward for the implementation of SDGs in Pakistan. The assessment was conducted by the provincial and national lead organizations of Pakistan Development Alliance and shared with

the concerned stakeholders including Parliamentary Task Force members, SDG Units, private sector organizations, CSOs, academics, and media.

- Despite challenges like shrinking civic spaces and new financial regulations to control NGOs in Pakistan, in January 2019 AwazCDS and member organizations of Pakistan Development Alliance from across the country initiated an inclusive process to produce an alternate VNR of SDG implementation in 42 districts across the country. The alternate VNR report will be shared with stakeholders during the 2019 HLPF. The Pakistan Development Alliance also planned to share its findings by organizing a Pre-HLPF National Stakeholders Consultation in June 2019.

#### Colombia

- In Colombia, since the end of 2012, the Colombian Confederation of NGOs has worked to establish, together with a network of more than 150 CSOs of Colombia, an advocacy agenda based on three key actions, which seeks to strengthen its political role by actively participating in the reflection, analysis, construction of contributions, and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

#### Brazil

- Since 2014, the [Brazilian Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda](#) has facilitated dialogues with the government, alongside [Abong](#). Not only has civil society produced [spotlight reports](#) on SDG progress and comprehensive recommendations to improve accountability and transparency, but it has also generated high-quality data and analysis to monitor and correct the implementation of public policies.
- In Brazil CSOs' advocacy [initiatives](#) led to the creation of a [Parliamentarian Group](#) to monitor SDG implementation.
- In Brazil an online [Platform](#) was created in 2018 to provide available national data on the SDG targets, the adjustment of [targets to the national context](#), and an [award](#) for best practices.

#### United Kingdom

- In 2018, UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) published a report that assessed the UK's performance on the SDGs. The report, titled 'Measuring Up,' is the most comprehensive review of the current situation in the UK conducted to date.<sup>6</sup> It describes what is happening in the UK for people, the environment and the economy. The report was produced by over 100 organizations, whose inputs were coordinated by UKSSD with the financial backing of a number of large charities and businesses. The first part of the report assesses the UK's performance Goal by Goal, and the second part considers the types of governance architecture that will be needed to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. The production of the SDG16chapter was led by the CSO "Involve." Using baseline data provided by academic partners and checked by the Office of National Statistics, Involve researched and analyzed the UK's performance against each of the SDG16 indicators. This included an assessment of the policy landscape in the UK. This research was published and a wide range of stakeholders was invited to review and contribute. The assessment was then revisited by Involve and amended based on feedback, before it was finalised as a summary chapter in the final report.

#### Recommendations

The diverse national case studies submitted for this report have yielded a range of important recommendations for the effective implementation of the SDGs at the national level, and in particular of SDG16. While many of the recommendations were made with the contributor's specific national context in mind, several apply to other national contexts around the world. These recommendations include:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ukssd.co.uk/measuringup>

## **National Implementation**

- Governments should develop an overarching and cross-cutting National Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda generally and ensure that agreed processes are developed for redesigning existing policies or ensuring that new policies and programmes embed the SDG targets, and especially those of SDG16.
- More official analysis needs to be carried out into the interlinkages between the various SDGs and the institutional implications at national levels of addressing potential linkages in an integrated way.
- Governments should develop a “whole of government” governance architecture as this is essential to accelerate the implementation and realization of the SDGs.
- National oversight mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda and its individual SDGs should be created by establishing multi-stakeholder national SDG working groups. The role of oversight bodies such as the National Parliament in monitoring SDG implementation should also be strengthened.
- Governments must ensure that public institutions such as election bodies, national human rights institutions (NHRI) and anti-corruption agencies are fully engaged at national level in the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

## **Sub-national implementation**

- Governments should translate and integrate SDG16 at a sub-national level via Decentralization and De-concentration reforms, and through Public Administrative and Public Financial Reform to local and provincial authorities. Local government systems need to become more effective and efficient, with more political and financial autonomy so that the localization of SDGs can be made possible at district and sub-district levels.

## **Awareness-Raising & Capacity Building**

- The challenges civil society faces in terms of monitoring and keeping the government accountable for SDG16 implementation include a lack of awareness about the 2030 Agenda in the first place. Increasing the knowledge and capacities of CSOs linked to the Agenda will increase their capacity to monitor their government's progress on SDG16 and on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.
- Capacity development linked to the 2030 Agenda, and to SDG16 in particular, should be provided for various stakeholders such as CSOs, organizations, businesses, and governments so they can begin to align their policies, missions and actions with SDG16.
- There is a need for public awareness projects and programs for SDG16 and its targets and to create a connection between the subject areas of SDG16 and issues across different countries and the potential to make progress in solving them.
- Civil society should be properly resourced to carry out public education campaigns linked to various aspects of SDG16 implementation, including for example launching national campaigns on issues such as greater transparency on tax breaks, comprehensive drug laws, initiatives to promote violence reduction and security, and initiatives to monitor the use of the Freedom of Information Act, as well as practical guides to help groups use the law to strengthen advocacy around SDG16.

## **Governance**

- Countries who are not members should consider joining the Open Government Partnership and adhering to the commitments that membership entails, as this is seen to have been a very important step in pushing the United Kingdom towards achieving many of the targets of SDG16.

## **Participation**

- Effective VNR-related outreach and consultative mechanisms should be created to ensure that inputs and recommendations from all stakeholders, including CSOs and development partners, will contribute to the

official VNR and to national-level SDG implementation

### **Enabling Environment**

- Governments should strengthen a supportive, enabling environment for civil society actors to actively engage in SDG monitoring and evaluation, including in the reporting processes.

### **Human Rights**

- Human rights and fundamental freedoms should be strengthened at the national level and awareness promoted at local as well as provincial government levels, so that human rights defenders and victims of repression and abuse are protected, as is required by SDG16.
- Governments should encourage and facilitate civil society engagement in monitoring and evaluation of UN treaty bodies at the national and international levels (including drafting of civil society reports and participation in reporting processes before international treaty bodies) should be strengthened.

### **Data**

- Governments everywhere should take the necessary steps to ensure a systematic data collection process and the development of relevant data analysis and storage platforms at national level. Data gaps need to be identified and addressed as quickly as possible for better policy formulations and realization of the SDGs at all levels. A reliable national SDG database system needs to be created with the consent of all related stakeholders including CSOs and government departments.
- Each government must recognize and accept the results of citizen-led data initiatives, which are ample. This could be done by using both qualitative information (case studies) and quantitative data/information in national monitoring reports. This will not only improve the engagement between the CSOs and the government but also help building ownership among participating stakeholders in a sustained manner.
- Governments and other stakeholders should recognize the link between human rights and the SDGs, and to welcome the initiative of the UN Human Rights Council and the report by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Draft guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs," as important and useful tools for the promotion of civic participation and public engagement with in the SDGs.

### **Public Access to Information**

- National governments must guarantee the right to transparent, accurate, timely, and relevant public information, so that all development actors can fulfill their roles. Clear information in citizens' language, which is updated frequently, should be ensured so these SDG data platforms become increasingly known and used, not only by governments and experts, but also by CSOs, the academy, and citizens.

### **Other recommendations**

- Bottom-up approaches should be utilized in working with communities to identify pressure points, root causes of violence and crime, and to realign federal, provincial/territorial and municipal investment towards evidence-based prevention programs
- Civil society should evaluate its "value offer" in relation to the implementation of the SDGs and assume a social role through recognizing themselves as co-responsible actors of development and not merely as executors of projects and resources.
- "Partnerships for Knowledge" should be recognized and supported by governments with the aim of promoting and recognizing "social innovation" and specific, valuable forms of cultural knowledge including traditional indigenous knowledge.



## TAP Network “Partners”: Commitments to Action on SDG16+

In 2015, 193 national governments adopted the [2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), including the TAP Network’s priority goal, [SDG16](#), which aims to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.’ To date, significant advancements have been made towards meeting the targets of SDG16—but challenges remain. In many countries, the lack of concrete commitments to accelerating action around SDG16 work represent one of the primary barriers to implementing and monitoring of this Goal. As a result of these commitment gaps, overall achievement for SDG16 is falling short of its targets—and in fact backsliding on the headway that has been made since 2015 is becoming a concerning global trend. Many CSOs around the world have recognized this challenge and are making strong commitments to forwarding progress around peace, justice, and strong institutions. However, other stakeholders—especially national governments who are the primary duty bearers of the 2030 Agenda—must also commit to and follow through on their own commitments to SDG16, if real advancement in this space is to be made. TAP's work is underpinned by the recognition that we maximize reach and influence when many stakeholders speak with a unified voice.

In an effort to encourage action by civil society around SDG16, the TAP Network’s Membership Engagement structure centers around encouraging civil society stakeholders to set specific “commitments” to taking forward SDG16 in their own contexts. To collect these commitments, the TAP Network has created a dedicated [platform which allows CSOs to engage in multiple ways](#). Commitments made by TAP Network Partners outline explicit actions that a particular organization is undertaking, or will undertake, to support SDG16 or accountability for the overall 2030 Agenda. These commitments help us identify key civil society champions around TAP's priority issues. These commitments are showcased on the TAP Network website, with Partners expected to report on their progress towards their commitments periodically.

This section seeks to highlight the commitments collected from CSOs to date and analyzes their main gaps, challenges and needs. It then provides recommendations for next steps around commitments, including how the international community can gather further commitments from a wider range of stakeholders going forward, and then ensure accountability to these promises for action.

### Highlights and analysis of TAP Network civil society commitments around SDG16

Recognizing the need to encourage meaningful progress around SDG16, the TAP Network established an online platform to collect SDG16 commitments from civil society working around the globe. Through this platform, CSOs can make specific commitments outlining the work their organizations are doing to advance the overall targets of SDG16 and accountability for the 2030 Agenda.

#### TAP Network guidelines and methodologies for civil society commitments

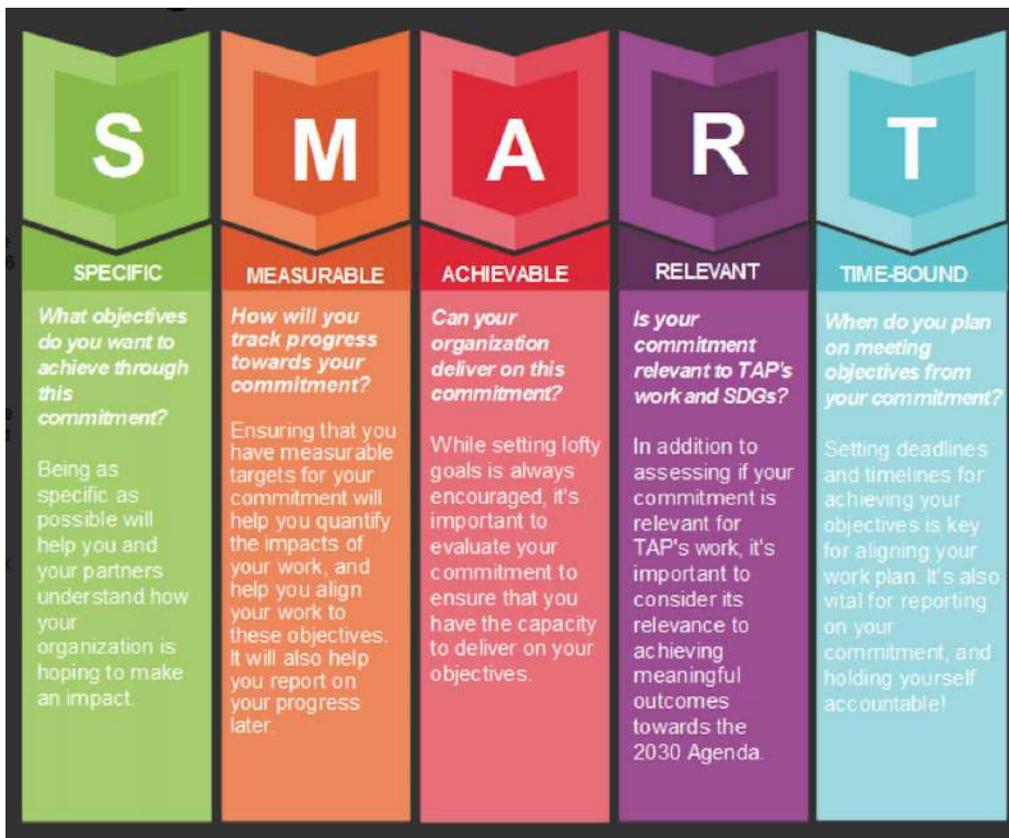
The civil society commitments collected by the TAP Network are intended to accelerate concrete action around SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda more broadly. As such, TAP has established specific guidelines and methodologies for civil society to adhere to when establishing their own commitments to action.

According to this criteria, civil society SDG16 commitments should be succinct and have very clear objectives. The more specific organizations can be when submitting commitments, the stronger the commitment and subsequent follow-up will be. Since these commitments will be showcased publicly, it is important to highlight the great work and realistic—even lofty—ambitions of your organization, and to clearly outline how you will go about implementing this commitment.

In addition to making concrete commitments to action, CSOs are expected to commit to the following guiding principles around the SDGs and 2030 Agenda:

- Uphold and embody the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in your organization’s work;
- Uphold all of the targets and principles outlined within SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda, including by upholding the commitment to leaving no one behind in the work of their organization, and working openly and inclusively with other TAP Network Partners or Members;
- Helping advance the overall mission and objectives of the TAP Network, including around SDG16 and accountability for the 2030 Agenda; and
- Ensuring that your organization’s work embodies the principles of transparency, accountability and participation.

It is also important for these commitments to fit the S.M.A.R.T. criteria below:



In making these commitments on TAP's platform, CSOs also pledge to follow up on and review progress towards meeting their stated objectives. To do this, pledging CSOs are expected to report on their headway towards achieving the commitments every two years, with interim mid-term reports uploaded onto the TAP Network's platform every year.

Highlights of civil society commitments for SDG16 already collected include:

- Over 70 civil society commitments have been collected from every region of the globe;
- Pledging CSOs include experts on all the targets of SDG16, as well as accountability for the 2030 Agenda, SDG data and indicators, HLPF and UN development system reform, voluntary national reviews (VNRs), and other issues around sustainable development;
- Pledging CSOs have unanimously affirmed commitments to:
  - Uphold and embody the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in their respective organization's work
  - Uphold all of the targets and principles outlined within SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda, including by upholding the commitment to leaving no one behind, and working openly and inclusively
  - Helping advance the overall mission and objectives of the TAP Network, including around SDG16 and accountability for the 2030 Agenda; and
  - Ensuring work that embodies the principles of transparency, accountability, and participation.
- Pledging CSOs plan to help forward these commitments by contributing to:
  - Global, regional, and national coordination mechanisms around SDG16 and accountability for the 2030 Agenda;
  - Thematic coordination mechanisms around SDG16 and accountability for the 2030 Agenda;
  - Development of national and local level capacity development resources, tools, and events for civil society;
  - Development of global and regional advocacy materials; and
  - Voluntary financial and in-kind contributions.

Key commitment gaps, challenges, and needs for SDG16 civil society:

While it is exciting to see civil society pledging to undertake concrete actions for SDG16, challenges remain in both increasing the strength and number of these commitments, and those made by other SDG16 stakeholders.

- **Strengthening civil society SDG16 commitments already made**—Despite the guidance provided by the TAP Network in how to develop a strong commitment for SDG16, many of the commitments submitted by civil society have the potential to be strengthened and improve the quality even further. By ensuring that commitments uphold S.M.A.R.T. criteria, and also that they are increasingly actionable, evidence-based, and data-driven (including via official and non-official data sources), these commitments will have a greater impact in the SDG16 space. In addition, these commitments should have a sense of urgency and innovation and be collaborative amongst multi-stakeholder groups—especially with national governments.
- **Increasing the number of SDG16 commitments**—A significant number of commitments have been made by CSOs, but more are needed from both civil society and other stakeholders working to implement and monitor SDG16. Civil society is driving much of the momentum around calls for commitments and are increasingly focusing on encouraging national governments to make their own commitments to accelerating progress. Like civil society's own commitments, the promises of national governments must look to be concrete and actionable.
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## Further action around SDG16 commitments

The following recommendations provide a non-exhaustive list of additional actions that can and should be taken to strengthen commitments to SDG16 and increase the political acceleration of this work:

- **Establish a formal platform to collect, showcase, and review commitments**—The TAP Network has already established an informal platform for civil society commitments, but a formal platform, managed by the UN or another global body, is needed in order to encourage and support the commitments of multi-stakeholders. This platform should be accompanied by an official monitoring mechanism in order to hold stakeholders, specifically national governments, accountable.
- **Further national capacity building support for civil society and other stakeholders**, including the development of tools and resources to support SDG16, as well as the coordination of national workshops and trainings. The TAP Network has created a number of guides to address the capacity needs and gaps of civil society, including [Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit](#), [Advocacy: Justice and the SDGs](#) and the [SDG Accountability Handbook](#), and has conducted over 20 national workshops to train local level CSOs on SDG16, the VNRs, and accountability around the 2030 Agenda. Other capacity development supports, such as direct funding and more inclusive opportunities for engagement at the regional and global levels, are also necessary. See section on “Analysis from TAP Network paper on capacity development” for a full list of recommendations.

Going forward, the TAP Network intends to continue to collect more civil society commitments and strengthen implementation efforts around those already pledged. Through these civil society commitments, we hope to encourage other stakeholders, specifically governments as the primary duty bearers of SDG16, to make their own concrete commitments to accelerating progress around peace, justice, and inclusive societies.



## Supporting Civil Society in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States going for a VNR in 2019: Showcasing 2019 national civil society SDG16 workshops

### *Introduction*

The **Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)**<sup>7</sup> is the global network of civil society actors, experts, and academics from the South and the North who work together to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding in fragile situations. For the first time since the advent of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, progress towards SDG16 – along with several other SDGs – will have a detailed review at the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2019. With the support of the French MEAE and EU/DEVCO, this has prompted CSPPS to implement its Ready for Review project. The Ready for Review is a CSPPS project to support civil society engagement in fragile and conflict-affected (FCAS) countries participating in the 2019 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). Ready for Review is implemented in partnership with the TAP Network.

Ready for Review is built around political dialogue processes taking place in context of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS)-partnership and entails that CSPPS will seek to ensure – in partnership with the TAP Network and local civil society partners – the meaningful inclusion, participation, and contribution of civil society during VNR processes – with a focus on SDG16+ – within a group of selected countries, namely Côte d’Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Chad, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Rwanda, Ghana, and Nigeria. The group of target countries illustrates CSPPS’ willingness to make use of the existing partnership as built up in the context of the IDPS while at the same time opening doors for new connections by providing support to non-g7+ countries (Rwanda, Ghana and Nigeria) in amplifying the voice of civil society in relevant policy processes around the VNR.

### *Process, Methodology and Results*

The planning process for the Ready for Review project commenced through discussions with the UN Development Program (UNDP), which in January 2019 solicited feedback from those members of the g7+ going for review on their plan and needs for support in planning and implementing the VNR-review process. Subsequently, CSPPS established contact with UNDP country offices to learn about the VNR government plans and the role played by UNDP experts and consultants to collect data for the report. A partnership with the TAP Network was embarked upon to jointly co-organize and co-sponsor workshop and strategically collaborate in context of the review processes embarked upon.

At the country level, the support enabled CSPPS to ensure – to the extent possible depending on the political context and with the help of the expert facilitator recommended in context of the TAP Network collaboration - the meaningful inclusion, participation, and contribution of national and local CSOs (including through targeted outreach to involve youth- and women-led organizations) during the consultation and validation stages of the VNR process in Côte d’Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Chad, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Ghana<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> See for more information on the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding: [www.cspps.org](http://www.cspps.org)

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that at the time this chapter was written in mid-June CSPPS had so far successfully carried out the workshops for which it was in the lead in Côte d’Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Chad, and also provided support for the workshop co-organized with the TAP Network in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Nigeria and Rwanda. Although the other

Workshop results were intended to inform the national VNR reports under preparation and to support the next steps in the localization and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Undoubtedly, the liaison efforts made by CSPPS throughout the in-country consultation processes either directly improved or planted the seeds for better coordination between government-led and civil society-led activities.

The qualitative data collected during these in-country consultative workshops laid the foundation for a civil society common positioning around the current state of SDG implementation at the national level. The combination of workshop activities with outreach to IDPS, donor and government partners has helped to garner needed strategic support for VNR processes while at the same time catalyzing entry points for follow-up discussion with the same actors by our local partners. By expanding its collaboration with the TAP Network to Nigeria, Rwanda, and Ghana, the Platform extended its reach and support into non-g7+ countries. Subsequently, both during and after the HLPF, CSPPS set to organize a peer-to-peer exchange to reflect upon the VNR experiences of CSO representatives involved.

### *Country Experiences*

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, CSPPS and its Country Team focal point teamed up with local civil society partner ISC-ODD/CI and the UNDP Country Office to plan together and host two consultation workshops on SDGs and the VNR process in Abidjan (26-27 April 2019) and Bouaké (30 April-1 May 2019). Workshops results and reflexions have been captured in a preliminary civil society report and communicated to UNDP, the ministries of economic planning and of sustainable development.

Following the SDG and VNR orientation and sensitization workshop for CSOs, CSPPS and Cordaid held in Bangui, **Central African Republic** in February 2019, CSPPS joined forces with the Ministry of Economy, Planning and International Cooperation, Cordaid, World Vision, and TAP Network and held an SDG and VNR workshop for local CSOs on 7 May 2019 as a crucial final step towards collecting civil society's contribution to the VNR consultation process.

CSPPS, its Country Team focal point and ADIN expert (TAP Network) completed an SDG and VNR workshop in N'Djamena, **Chad** on 13-14 June 2019. The meeting offered an opportunity to provide inputs in the final stages of the VNR report "validation process" in Chad.

In **Sierra Leone**, CSPPS partnered with the TAP Network to co-support a workshop on the VNR process and SDG16 in Makeni on 12-13 June 2019, jointly organized by ChildHelp Sierra Leone, Non-State Actors Secretariat and the CSPPS New Deal Country Team.

In **Timor-Leste**, the CSPPS focal point organization was involved as a permanent member in the government-led SDG Working Group which prepared the SDGs national report. In addition, CSPPS, TAP Network, Asia Development Alliance (ADA) and local partners co-organized a two-day SDG16-focused workshop in Dili on 18-19 June 2019.

In partnership with a TAP focal point organization on the ground, Human Rights First Rwanda Association, the TAP Network and CSPPS co-organized an SDG16 and VNR process workshop in Kigali, **Rwanda** in May 2019.

TAP Network and CSPPS are in the final stages of preparation to organize a strategic reflexion workshop in Lagos, **Nigeria**. Though Nigeria is not embarking on a VNR-process, it was felt to be a key strategic country to include in the review process – especially to look at the current status of SDG implementation since its earlier review in 2017.

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countries in the list above had not yet at that stage carried out their VNR and SDG16 workshops, all the evidence available at the time suggested that local partners were on track to do so on planned dates agreed upon.

CSPPS facilitated liaison with UNDP Headquarters in New York for platform member GPPAC to establish contact with Ghana UNDP country office. GPPAC subsequently organized a VNR workshop with involvement of their local partner, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP).

### *Lessons Learned*

- (1) **VNR consultation activities can mark a starting point for improved dialogue and coordination.** It is essential to engage at an early stage with a variety of national and international key stakeholders, and to gain a basic understanding of what's in the pipeline, how to better coordinate activities, delineate tasks among organizations, and form coalitions which can cement into fruitful working relationships. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire the partnership established with local civil society platform ISC-ODD/CI and UNDP did not end after carrying out the consultative workshops. Partners are currently planning a follow-up "capitalization" workshop after the HLPF.
- (2) **Know your added value and shine a light on it.** Unlike the government and UNDP, civil society enjoys absolute proximity to the concerns, grievances, and expectations of the population. The workshop methodology was accordingly developed to focus on bringing out this qualitative added value of society's contribution to the VNR process in order not to replace but to complement the more technically-oriented support as provided by UNDP experts and consultants (quantitative data collection, etc.) in charge of preparing the national report on SDGs.
- (3) **Lack of VNR experience can be palliated by early preparation and organization.** Countries producing a review for the first time but who prepared themselves early for the VNR process were able to "step into the unknown" with more confidence to report for the first time on SDG16 and better handle unforeseen challenges. For example, in Central African Republic the government set up a multi-stakeholder inter-ministerial committee on the SDGs shortly after announcing in July 2018 that it would present a VNR report in 2019. Creating such a committee enabled the government to identify early in the process its key challenges and opportunities, thus allowing it to offer appropriate responses and identify necessary partners.
- (4) **Context differs, which is why it matters.** Civic space, or civil society space, is determining where and to what degree civil society is actively invited to be part and parcel of the consultation process. Success relies heavily on political willingness at the national level to allow for meaningful inclusion, participation and contributions of civil society to be taken on board during the VNR-processes.
- (5) **Yes, the quality of inclusion and participation matters, but so does communication.** Governments must make efforts to include civil society in VNR processes. However, efforts need to come from both sides. Once civil society representatives have been included in SDG committees and have access to key information, civil society needs to seize that chance to mobilize its wider constituencies through pro-active and coordinated communication and ongoing consultation. The more involved a CSO is in a VNR process (e.g. part of a national SDG inter-ministerial committee), the more access it has to key information, placing it in a unique position to influence the content of a VNR report. This ability to influence discussions comes with an even greater responsibility to report back to wider constituencies on the state of discussion and preliminary results through efficient communication channels. For instance, in Chad such a feedback system between civil society inside and outside the VNR process was not optimally functioning, which makes it a missed opportunity to ensure greater impact and effectively influence the policy debate. In other words, with inclusion and participation comes responsibility, transparency, and accountability towards one's constituency.
- (6) **Next to securing financial support from donors, it is key to include their local delegations as fully-fledged stakeholders in the process.** Support from bilateral and multilateral donors was instrumental in fostering an enabling environment for coordinated and concerted dialogue around VNR processes and the content of national SDG reports – and that involves representatives from those same donor actors in the process embarked upon, whether in consultation process, or as actor and participant in the process itself.
- (7) **Civil society understands the opportunity provided by the VNR process and wants to do more.** Civil society does not want to limit itself to a role of qualitative reviewer. It would like to actively contribute to the process and add its voice in the strategic review of progress made on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Wherever

CSPPS Country Teams were in the lead to organize and host SDG16 and VNR consultative workshops, we can attest to civil society's desire to contribute to data collection and analysis; hopefully this will be possible by the time their government makes the decision to review national progress on the 2030 Agenda again.

- (8) **Whenever possible, open up the VNR workshop planning process to other local partners outside of usual partners, and vice versa.** The presence of organized civil society around key thematic areas is helpful and has provided entry point for strategic discussions as to how the VNR process could be backed through the support of CSPPS country team colleagues in partnership with local partners from the TAP Network and wider civil society representatives. Examples from our country experiences testify to the added value of a multi-stakeholder approach embarked upon in context of the SDG review and VNR-consultations.

### *Next steps and Conclusions*

CSPPS and the TAP Network will continue to harvest learnings emanating from the process, document lessons learned, and embark on cross-exchange of experiences. Presenting VNRs at the HLPF is an important step but not the end point. Ideally the review should lead to a comprehensive and honest report on where a country stands in the process of actualization and implementation of the 2030 Agenda – and is also indicate the next steps and recommendations on how to further accelerate the implementation of the Agenda in their country context.

The national workshops have enabled CSPPS and the TAP Network to help ensure meaningful inclusion, participation, and contribution of national and local CSOs in the consultation and validation stages of the VNR processes in targeted countries.

As elaborated upon in the lessons learned section of this chapter there is no one-size-fits-all template for organizing and embarking upon a VNR process. Contexts differ and determine the parameters of the process. The IDPS partnership and existing relations with other relevant stakeholders involved in the VNR process have been instrumental in finding strategic entry points for constructive engagement and meaningful input from civil society in the review processes.

The partnership as embarked upon with the TAP Network has enabled both networks to pool resources as well as combine their partner networks. The outcomes of the resulting broader civil society consultation processes has helped to amplify the voice of civil society in the VNR-processes in selected countries.

The learnings emanating from the Ready for Review process are hoped to inform subsequent review processes. The VNR consultation processes clearly have provided a strategic entry point for continuous dialogue and coordination around next steps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at country level.

## Localization: Putting SDG16+ into Practice

Achieving the 2030 Agenda is an enormous challenge. The commitments to peace, justice, and inclusion under SDG16+ are critical for enabling progress on the whole range of Sustainable Development Goals, but this is also one of the most demanding goals to translate into action.

So how can the international commitments to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies be turned into real change that addresses injustice and inequality at a local and national level? And how can it help to involve citizens in the decisions that affect their lives and their communities?

Saferworld has developed practical steps that can help translate the SDG16+ into action based on our experiences working with people, organizations and authorities at local and national levels in various conflict-affected countries. This chapter describes the work underway in Somaliland since 2016, where a number of civil society organizations have been working with the authorities to create locally-owned policies and actions to put SDG16+ into practice.

### What have we done?

Saferworld’s approach is based on identifying and investing in local forces for peace, justice, and inclusion – positive change-agents and innovative initiatives – and enabling them to use the SDG16+ framing and legitimacy to bring about change. There is no blueprint for this process, but we have identified a number of steps for catalyzing and supporting locally-led implementation of SDG16+. In Somaliland, this has included the following:



**Raising Awareness:** Many people around the world are not familiar with the SDGs. This was certainly true in Somaliland in 2016. Raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the commitments in SDG16+ outside major cities and those already familiar with the SDG framework and process is essential. In Somaliland we targeted groups ranging from political parties, civil servants, academics, private sector companies, civil society organizations, and community activists, with a series of workshops and public events both in the capital and in other cities in more remote regions.

Full Graphic at <https://www.safeworld.org.uk/multimedia/putting-sdg16-into-practice>

**Asking people what they want:** But awareness raising isn't enough. If there is seriousness about implementing the SDGs, then policies must reflect this commitment. For the 2030 Agenda, and SDG16+ in particular, there are a range of relevant policies, sometimes encompassed within a national development plan. Frequently though, these plans are not developed in consultation with the wider population, and they tend to be overambitious in relation to the resources available, which makes it hard to prioritize the most pressing concerns. To overcome this, in Somaliland,

Saferworld used the universal and comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda as a prompt for starting a new national conversation on development. These consultations helped citizens to identify what they regarded as national development priorities, and by engaging with minority and under-represented groups in each region ensured a more inclusive process.

**Mobilizing new partnerships and SDG16+ champions:** The inclusive nature of SDG16+ consultations helped to initiate new partnerships that bring together different constituencies - including those working on justice, peace, inclusion, youth issues, and gender issues – to work on national and local development priorities. This has included fostering greater collaboration between the government authorities and CSOs . There has also been new cooperation on issues that were previously contested, such as access to justice and ending female genital mutilation (FGM). Given the international legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda, new champions within government emerged, such as the Chief Justice and Minister of Justice, who have helped to motivate others nationally to take the SDG16+ agenda seriously.

**Finding new entry points for action:** As SDG16+ became more familiar in Somaliland, key stakeholders began acting on the identified priorities. Using the SDG16+ framing, a new national conversation was initiated on improving justice across Somaliland. For the first time, authorities, CSOs, members of the judiciary, and other non-state actors came together in an inclusive forum to consider how Somaliland can address the justice targets in SDG16+ - specifically SDG target 16.3 on ensuring access to justice for all. Similarly, a new campaign on SDG target 5.5 – ensuring women’s political participation – began, while previously disconnected organizations started to collaborate on advocacy to implement SDG target 5.3 - end all forms of FGM.

**Bridging local and global:** Beyond the national dimension, authorities and non-governmental groups have been part of global conversations on SDG16+ to share Somaliland’s experience with the wider international community and learn from others facing similar challenges. Somaliland civil society leaders have been supported to attend each HLPF – representing their work on the global stage and bringing back the experience to the national level.

**Consolidating collaboration:** What started as an organic process has gradually become more structured – as the leading CSOs working to implement SDG16+ in Somaliland have come together to form the Somaliland SDG16+ Coalition. This coalition is collaborating to address SDG16+ priorities in Somaliland, as well as to monitor and evaluate national progress in delivering the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, the SDG16+ Coalition produced a National Civil Society Progress Report to analyze the development process in Somaliland, assess progress on SDG16+, and identify gaps.

### **What now?**

Over a quarter of the way to the 2030 goalposts, it is clear that SDG16+ has taken root in Somaliland. With the identification of national and sub-national priorities, a national development plan aligned with SDG16+, new interventions to strengthen peace, justice, and inclusion, civil society leaders sharing their account of progress and challenges at the HLPF, Somaliland has become a pioneer of putting SDG16+ into practice.

These are still early days, however. To sustain this progress, Somaliland will need:

- Continued financial and technical assistance to address priority SDG16+ targets;
- Support to strengthen institutions tasked with monitoring progress; and
- Opportunities to exchange and learn from other good practices regionally and globally.



## Opportunities for Achieving Justice for All

To achieve the ambitious commitment to ensure “equal access to justice for all” by 2030 enshrined in SDG16, it is crucial to empower communities with the means and capacity to exercise their rights. This bottom-up work of legal empowerment - often led by civil society grassroots justice defenders - is necessary for ensuring that justice systems are people-centered and function fairly and effectively. Justice defenders are independent of political influence and raise awareness of rights, law and policies, help clients navigate legal and administrative processes in the pursuit of remedies, and support citizen engagement in law and policy reform at the national level.

Since 2015 there has been increased attention and awareness on the justice-related targets of the 2030 Agenda by governments and civil society working to advance access to justice. However, progress on implementation has been slow, hampered in part by a lack of coordination and concerted action by governments, a failure to make new policies or finance the agenda, a lack of understanding on how access to justice can benefit other development outcomes, and an omission or unwillingness to include civil society in planning, implementation, and monitoring processes.

Additionally, grassroots justice defenders - those who carry out the work of legal empowerment - are chronically under-resourced and increasingly under threat. A recent survey by the Global Legal Empowerment Network revealed that two-thirds of legal empowerment organizations would have to cut programming or close within the next year due to funding challenges. Moreover, 67% were harassed, intimidated, or worse in the past year. Lack of financing and protection are themes that continue to resurface within conversations about how to best support civil society in national reporting and action on access to justice and SDG16. The 2030 Agenda cannot be realized without confronting and addressing these urgent challenges.

To address these gaps in SDG16 implementation, in 2018 the Global Legal Empowerment Network launched “Justice For All” - a global campaign to scale up funding and protection for grassroots justice defenders. Justice For All builds on the galvanized momentum around the adoption of the SDGs and works to mobilize collective action to drive forward access to justice commitments. This campaign supports the national and cross-border coordination of grassroots justice defenders around the common call for increased funding and protection, works to mobilize action around the SDGs, and pushes back against closing civic space.

The cases highlighted below provide a few examples of how grassroots justice defenders have helped to move forward access to justice commitments through program implementation, mobilization, collective advocacy, and cooperation alongside governments.

### Case Study 1: Mozambique

In Mozambique, grassroots justice defenders in the form of community health workers at Namati worked collaboratively with the Ministry of Health to pilot, adopt, and implement an effective tool for increasing access to health services, a critical justice issue to drive progress on the SDGs. Since mid-2016, Namati health advocates have worked alongside local health committees to assess health services twice yearly. The tool that is used for assessment is user-friendly and incorporates feedback from the community, as well as the health workers themselves. The health advocates, alongside the health committee members, then analyze each problem, plan strategies and next steps, outputs, and deadlines. This consultative and inclusive process from the grassroots level

to the government allows Namati, communities, and the government to track progress on barriers to the right to health in their community over time. The engagement in bi-annual health facility assessments has also empowered community members to break their silence and overcome barriers to care which had previously gone unaddressed, including violations of confidentiality and privacy, lack of access to information, bribery, and disrespectful treatment. In 2017, after seeing firsthand evidence of its impact, the Ministry of Health formally recognized Namati's biannual health facility assessments as part of its national strategy on humanization and quality of health services. This is an example of how civil society-led efforts on access to justice can support cross-cutting themes of the SDGs such as health, and how the government can and has taken on approaches led by civil society to help bring these interventions to scale.

### **Case Study 2: Kenya**

In Kenya, in 2019, the newly formed Parliamentary Caucus on Sustainable Development Goals and Business encouraged participation of a wide range of actors to develop a strategic plan on the role of the caucus in realizing the SDGs. Through a Stakeholders Workshop and Validation Meeting, the caucus brought together representatives from civil society, corporate social responsibility departments, and other business entities to gather feedback and recommendations on key priorities and actions the caucus could take to promote progress under various SDGs in Kenya. For SDG16, it was suggested that the caucus recommend a budgetary allocation be made to help implement the existing Legal Aid Law, which was adopted in 2016 to advance SDG16, but is yet to receive public funding. The workshop outcomes were included in the final strategic plan. Through this outreach, the caucus was able to design a plan grounded in the needs of the population, supported by non-governmental actors that can further support and collaborate to roll out effective government policies and realize the SDGs in the country.

### **Case Study 3: Indonesia**

In 2009, Indonesia developed a National Access to Justice Strategy (NAJS) to fulfil the Indonesian Constitution and relevant legislation, which recognizes that Indonesian people have a right to access justice. When the SDGs were adopted the NAJS was revised to include robust access to justice indicators to accelerate progress on increasing access to justice. The Indonesian government and civil society recognized the limitation of the global indicators for SDG target 16.3. To ensure that the government was effectively monitoring access to justice and improving policies on access to justice the government worked with CSOs including members of the Global Legal Empowerment Network to design access to justice indicators that would be tracked by government and civil society. This collaboration strengthened the national coalitions and partnerships needed to advance access to justice in Indonesia. Using findings from the data collected, many of the same actors collaborated to design a robust access to justice commitment for Indonesia's 2018 Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan. This commitment recognizes the vital role of civil society in expanding access to justice across the country and seeks to combat the unequal distribution of legal aid. The government has promised to create regulations that guarantee funding for the legal aid organizations, allowing them to expand their reach to more remote and poorer communities, and to begin a civic education campaign to teach citizens how to identify rights violations and explain how legal aid providers can help them win justice for their grievances. This case study suggests that similar approaches can and should be used to promote increased access to justice in other countries, where government and civil society can work together to develop indicators, gather data, and create more effective policies.

### **The Path Forward**

These promising examples demonstrate why it is vital that governments and civil society work collaboratively to address the challenges in implementing access to justice if we want to see sufficient progress by 2030. Grassroots

justice defenders are essential for national reporting and action on SDG16 and must be effectively supported and protected to do this work.

Central to this support is ensuring effective inclusion of civil society and grassroots justice defenders in SDG16 planning, budgeting, and implementation processes. For those seeking to invest smartly in expanding access to justice, it is important to analyze and understand the range of justice issues in a given country: what they are, why they exist, and how to address them. Grassroots justice defenders can provide donors and policymakers with crucial insights into the legal needs of marginalized populations and solutions on how to overcome challenges and empower populations to hold institutions accountable. Moreover, where effective laws and policies have passed to increase protection of grassroots justice defenders, civil society has participated throughout the process, from design to implementation and evaluation. For budgeting purposes, civil society can provide insights into effective financing mechanisms for programs that advance government strategies on access to justice, while respecting civil society independence.

Lastly, civil society must collaborate and support those working at the grassroots level with tools and resources for action on SDG16 implementation. For example, Justice For All has co-designed tools with partners and grassroots campaigners to help grassroots justice defenders shape policy recommendations for decision makers to scale up funding and protection within their national contexts. Civil society partners worked collaboratively to produce the TAP Network's "SDG Accountability Handbook" and the "Advocacy, Justice, and the SDGs Toolkit" to provide national partners with tools for national-level advocacy around the planning, implementation, and monitoring of SDG16.

With adequate resources, support, and protection, grassroots justice defenders can accelerate action, support efforts, and hold accountable their governments and other stakeholders to realize the collective aspirations towards equal access to justice for all. With four years having already passed since SDG16 was adopted, now is the time for governments and donors to commit to concerted collaboration towards advancing this Agenda.



## Prompting governments to action: Civil Society Shadow Reporting on SDG16+

### Introduction

The Global Partnership for the Prevention Conflict (GPPAC), a network of more than 200 civil society organizations, has been involved in advocacy for and operationalization of SDGs with a view to preventing conflicts from turning violent and building peace<sup>9</sup>. GPPAC's Working Group on Influencing Policy, which brings together local peace activists from across the world, recognized the relevance of the SDG framework for the GPPAC network and supported its members to analyze and translate the SDG16+ agenda in their work. The Working Group supported two civil society-led national review processes, one in Cameroon and one in Ghana, which aimed to prompt their governments (and other stakeholders) to additional action. Through this GPPAC and its members seek to ensure that local realities drive national SDG peace agendas and to increase the commitment for SDG peace goals at local, national, and international levels. GPPAC members, Women in Alternative Action (WAA) Cameroon and West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), carried out those civil society reviews to assess progress and identify challenges as well as recommendations for more effective national and local implementation.

### Localization is a major civil society contribution to SDG16 reporting:

Localizing the global SDG agenda for policy setting, implementation, and monitoring alike is paramount to make it relevant on the ground. This is necessary to ensure progress is measured. Civil society can provide a major contribution to this. WAA Cameroon and WANEP Ghana took this as their departure point. In Cameroon, based on an initial context analysis and taking into account Cameroon's own national development vision, five SDG16 targets were selected for further tracking. The targets were then further refined into local indicators by a multi-disciplinary team during the inception workshop, which also led to the establishment of research teams. In its research in Ghana, WANEP focused on all the targets under SDG16 and selected targets under SDGs 4 and 5 that were identified as relevant to the country situation based on existing data from their ongoing early warning monitoring.

Both WAA Cameroon and WANEP ensured geographical coverage by conducting the study in ten out of ten regions in Cameroon and nine out of 16 regions in Ghana. A representative statistical sample of over 500 respondents participated in the research in both countries. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as one of the main tools for data collection in Cameroon and Ghana, complemented with an interview guide and focus group discussions with key informants and members of CSOs and the general public. These tools allowed the collection of a wide range of data and information related to the implementation of the SDG16 in Cameroon, and of SDG4, SDG5, and SDG16 in Ghana.

Initial analysis of the research findings culminated in draft reports that were presented to key stakeholders from the government, CSOs, academia, and the international community for validation during two workshops in May and June 2019. These workshops also served as initial strategy, planning, and advocacy sessions with the government of Cameroon taking up some of the recommendations from CSOs, and inviting WAA Cameroon to be part of their validation meeting. And CSOs in Ghana tailored their advocacy messages towards government and developed ideas on taking specific issues forward.

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<sup>9</sup> See for more information on the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict: [www.gppac.org](http://www.gppac.org)

### **What is lacking: responsiveness, information and participation in official processes**

A number of challenges arose during the fieldwork, including security, accessing relevant data, and implementing activities in crisis situations. Ultimately the ongoing crisis in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon and an outbreak of violence in one of the project towns in the North East region of Ghana did not impede the results and the overall field research, but it led to delays in data collection. A key concern in planning, implementation, and monitoring of SDG peace goals in fragile environments is the need for responsiveness and agility, which current civil society and government engagements and peace and development systems more broadly do not often provide. Another challenge was the time constraints for data collection. This was partially linked to internal planning but also to the lack of knowledge and information on government-led VNR process and timelines for providing input in a useful way. This points to a larger challenge GPPAC members face – namely their lack of involvement in the official VNR processes in both Cameroon and Ghana.

In Ghana an established CSO platform on the SDGs was involved in consultations with the government and the National Development Planning Commission (that is in charge of implementation of SDGs). But this platform was not fully representative of sectors covering the specific SDGs under review in 2019, with all relevant government entities focusing on peacebuilding. In Cameroon, there was no official civil society counterpart involved throughout the VNR process. WAA Cameroon was invited on an *ad hoc* basis to the government validation meeting, after the government took part in the CSO-led workshop. This was very welcomed and should be built upon. GPPAC also facilitated interactions between WANEP and WAA Cameroon and relevant UNDP representatives in country. In Cameroon this led to further engagements with the UNDP lead for the VNR, as well as the SDG coordinator inside government, and a range of other stakeholders. WAA Cameroon for example provided CSO inputs, based on its own national review, to the key VNR messages that government submitted to the UN. After the civil society validation workshop in Cameroon, which was attended by the government coordinator for SDGs, WAA Cameroon participated in the VNR technical committee set up by government, and equally participated in the validation of the government VNR report.

Overall, civil society inclusion and active participation in SDGs monitoring (as well as planning and implementation) is limited. Greater meaningful inclusion of civil society and other stakeholders, including women, youth, and other groups, particularly those who are marginalised, are needed to strengthen accountability and provide alternatives that are gender- and youth-responsive.

### **What is needed:**

Through the two reviews, civil society actors in both countries came up with a series of recommendations, which underpin their ongoing dialogues with their respective governments and other actors to advance inclusive peace in their countries. The recommendations cover three broad areas:

**Awareness, Inclusion and Active Participation:** SDGs are seen as an ‘elitist’ issue. A significant increase in effort by governments to raise broad awareness about SDG16 and the SDGs in general, as well as the VNR process, is required. To take this forward effectively, increased inclusion of and meaningful, inclusive coordination and partnership with civil society and other stakeholders, particularly the most marginalised, is needed. Governments should involve a broad range of CSOs including women and youth from the start in the elaboration and implementation of development strategies and their monitoring. This requires an open and secure environment for CSOs, particularly those working in crisis areas and conflict zones.

**Coordinated implementation:** One way to help achieve this is to adopt a national SDGs implementation agenda, which should include SDG targets that are contextualized to the country’s needs and priorities. This needs to be translated to the various agencies, institutionalized at all levels and translated into local language. Civil society in Ghana proposes to establish SDG committees or working groups, as multi-stakeholder platforms that should ensure

the effective implementation of the SDGs. Through these, CSOs working on the SDG16 and related Goals could be activated to mobilize stakeholders, monitor and evaluate progress made on SDG16, and enhance reporting. In order for such processes to take place, capacities of CSOs and other stakeholders need to be increased and support of external partners harnessed. Contextualized mechanisms are needed that can enable effective, coordinated implementation in an accountable and transparent manner.

**Integrated Implementation:** Linking SDG16 with other SDGs and investing in adequate infrastructures, including infrastructures for peace and access to justice in a coherent, integrated manner, will contribute to sustainable development and peace. These strategies should include such aspects as peace education in formal and non-formal structures, support for continued education of children and employment opportunities of youth, access to justice for all, active participation of citizens in political and decision-making processes and institutions, and enhancing the implementation of existing policies. But, critically, such integrated strategies must also include aspects of national security. A key recommendation for Cameroon was therefore to suspend military operations and initiate an inclusive and democratic dialogue with leaders of the Anglophone armed and political movements and the local populations affected by the conflict as well as initiate broader political inclusion and social delivery for all groups. Coordinating mechanisms are therefore crucial to such integrated approaches.

The reports and their recommendations intend to prompt more action on SDG16+, particularly by national governments. They seek to contribute to the outcomes and follow-up activities of the VNR process at national levels and beyond. To achieve this WAA Cameroon, WANEP and GPPAC participated at the Rome Conference, shared their preliminary findings, and advocated for the recommendations that came out from the civil society reviews in the two countries. The country reports and main GPPAC recommendations on how to take the SDG16+ agenda further will also be shared at the HLPF.

### **Conclusion**

The reviews found some positive developments related to SDG4, SDG5, and SDG16, as well as SDG16+ more broadly. However, significant shortcomings remain in both legal and policy frameworks and practical implementation, including with regard to partnerships and inclusivity. From GPPAC's experience it is clear that civil society-led reviews and spotlight reports are useful instruments to provide relevant data for the government, advocate for actions based on local needs, develop discussions and partnerships, and provide critical oversight. But sufficient funding for grounded and inclusive processes that provide the relevant, localized data required for reviews and ensuing actions is needed.

The reviews also point to the need for inclusive, whole-of-society approaches and actions that involve civil society and other actors in a meaningful manner. Key areas for this joint action include: 1) awareness-raising and translation of SDGs into existing local, national, and regional agendas in an inclusive and integrated manner; 2) developing inclusive partnerships and continuous collaboration between government and civil society to foster necessary mechanisms and political will; and 3) coordination among all actors to drive an integrated implementation of SDG16+.

The two reviews show that civil society actors are prepared to productively engage governments, can help tailor the SDGs to local contexts, and monitor local progress on SDG16+ by government, thereby ensuring that policies are turned into action. The two reviews should be the start of more sustained and inclusive nationwide processes to further translate the SDG16+ targets into practice in both countries. Both can become promising examples of joint action leading to greater joint commitments and urgently needed integrated and coordinated actions that meet local needs and aspirations.

# Challenges, Gaps and Opportunities around SDG16+

## *An analysis of trends around civil society Spotlight Reporting and national action on SDG16+*

The following section report provides an analysis of some of the key challenges, gaps and opportunities around civil society spotlight reporting and action, which takes from and builds upon reflections from the Empowering Civil Society reports' findings.

In many countries, capacity needs and gaps represent one of the primary barriers to accelerating action around implementing and monitoring SDG16. This is especially true for the capacities of non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society organizations (CSOs). As a result of these challenges and others, overall implementation and follow-up and review around SDG16 are falling short of national commitments. This section seeks to analyze the main gaps, challenges, and needs for additional capacity development support to CSOs working around SDG16. It then provides recommendations for how to address these capacity development issues going forward and, in doing so, accelerate progress in the SDG16 space.

### *Analysis of key civil society capacity gaps and needs around SDG16*

Civil society plays a key role in carrying out the work of implementing SDG16 on the ground around the world, and in holding national governments accountable to their commitments made in the 2030 Agenda. While official responsibilities for executing the work of the SDG16 are 'state-led,' engagement of civil society and other non-governmental stakeholders is essential for ensuring legitimacy and transparency of sustainable development efforts. For these reasons and others, the 2030 Agenda explicitly mandates broad, inclusive, meaningful, and people-centered participation at all levels.

Nevertheless, civil society and other non-state actors often work outside of or on the fringes of official national and sub-national SDG16 implementation and monitoring efforts, and therefore lack meaningful engagement in SDG16 processes. Often, such limitations or exclusion come about as a result of civil society's own capacity development issues.

### *Key capacity development gaps for SDG16 civil society*

- **Absence of an official platform for civil society spotlight reporting** within global monitoring and review mechanisms—as well as a lack of standardization of methodologies and guides for creating these reports, particularly for reporting on SDG16;
- **Dearth of capacity development workshops, trainings, resources, and tools** on spotlight reporting for civil society at the regional, national, and local levels;
- **Limited number and nature of convenings and consultations** that facilitate multi-stakeholder exchange and learning;
- **Non-inclusive processes** around the Voluntary National Review (VNRs);
- **Data collection and aggregation gaps**, as well as capacity challenges around data analysis;
- **Limited awareness about SDG16** targets, processes, bodies, and work; and
- Global trends towards **shrinking civic space** within countries.

## Local, national, and global drivers of civil society capacity issues

Trends in the ways in which CSOs—especially at the local and grassroots level—are composed and operate contribute to capacity deficits for SDG16 work—specifically in regard to civil society’s ability to: 1) access and manage available funds from philanthropic institutions, national governments, the private sector, and other actors; 2) create and disseminate SDG16 civil society spotlight reports and engage in other accountability processes, such as voluntary national reviews (VNRs); and 3) collect and aggregate data to inform evidence-based programs. Other issues, such as a general lack of knowledge and awareness of SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda more broadly, also contribute to civil society’s capacity deficits around SDG16 implementation and monitoring processes.

National-level challenges also feed into civil society’s overall capacity needs and gaps. Often, these issues stem from national governments’ inability and/or unwillingness to meaningfully engage civil society in SDG16 work, specifically as a result of their own weak institutions and service delivery systems, as well as their deficits with regard to cross-sector partnership, trust, and bridges between formal and informal processes. At times they also pursue efforts to shrink civic spaces.

Beyond national governments, the actions of the broader regional and international actors—such as UN agencies—also contribute to the decreased capacity of civil society actors working around SDG16, by failing to 1) require CSOs involvement in follow-up and review mechanisms like VNRs, 2) encourage SDG16 civil society spotlight reporting, and 3) provide meaningful engagement opportunities for civil society in global and regional forums.

## *Recommendations for Civil Society Capacity Development for SDG16*

Highlights of civil society capacity-building efforts for SDG16 already underway include:

- **Drafting, collecting, and showcasing of SDG16 civil society spotlight reporting.** The TAP Network is currently in the process of collecting spotlight reports and developing a platform to showcase them. Its recently released “[SDG Accountability Handbook](#)”, as well as its “[Beyond Voluntary National Reviews: Approaches and Methodologies for Civil Society Reporting on SDG16](#)” and “[Beyond Voluntary National Reviews: Approaches and Methodologies for Civil Society Reporting on the SDGs and 2030 Agenda](#)” papers, provide how-to guidance to civil society for drafting these types of reports. Additional resources such as Saferworld’s “[Enhancing accountability for peaceful, just and inclusive societies: Practical guidance for civil society reporting on SDG 16+](#)” also provide additional approaches to spotlight reporting.
- **Development of capacity-building resources and tools**, such as the TAP Network’s “[Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit](#)”; “[Advocacy: Justice and the SDGs](#)”; “[Beyond Voluntary National Reviews: Approaches and Methodologies for Civil Society Reporting on SDG16](#)”; [SDG16 Data Initiative](#); and “[SDG Accountability Handbook: A Practical Guide for Civil Society](#)”, and others.
- **Coordination of capacity-building workshops and trainings at regional, national, and local levels for civil society**, including many of the examples showcased in this report. A wide variety of methodologies and approaches for these types of trainings can be employed based on varying contexts, but it is still important to consider the needs and gaps of the specific stakeholder group targeted, as well as country context.
- **Convenings and consultations that facilitate multi-stakeholder exchange and learning.** This includes efforts between different SDG16-focused networks, as collaboration to support such work is critical for many reasons.
- **Collection of SDG16 civil society commitments.** The TAP Network is in the processing of creating a platform to showcase SDG16 civil society commitments, and is also encouraging other stakeholders, including national governments, working on SDG16 to make their own commitments to forwarding progress as well.

Recommendations for further civil society capacity development for SDG16 are as follows:

- **Further development of additional capacity-building resources and tools.** CSOs identified a potential need for more guidance around how to work with and even produce data to support civil society reporting on the SDGs (such guidance is included in TAP's recently released "[SDG Accountability Handbook](#)"), more guidance on the linkages between human rights and SDG16 and the existing human rights treaties and mechanisms, as well as SDG16 issue-specific resources similar to the TAP Network's "[Advocacy: Justice and the SDGs](#)".
- **Additional support for SDG16 civil society spotlight reporting at the national and local levels,** such as the development of a platform to collect and showcase civil society reports, case studies, and stories to the broader international community, such as the [Voices of SDG16+ campaign](#), [SDG Accountability Handbook case study collection/showcasing portal](#), and other initiatives in the works, and further coordination around ensuring inclusive VNRs.
- **Further coordination of capacity-building workshops and trainings at regional, national, and local levels** to help spur collaboration. All of the methodologies and approaches highlighted in this report can be used, depending on varying contexts, but collaboration between various groups should also be prioritized. Many of these case studies in the report specifically suggested that they see a significant opportunity in hosting workshops around VNR processes, as well as civil society spotlight reporting for the SDGs.
- **More funding and in-kind support opportunities** for CSOs operating at the grassroots and national levels working to implement and monitor SDG16 within countries, as well as coalitions of CSOs, such as the TAP Network, who are helping to both advocate on behalf of CSOs at the regional and global level and to coordinate and strengthen its partners' activities on the ground.
- **More meaningful convenings and consultations that facilitate multi-stakeholder exchange and learning,** especially at the global and regional level.
- **Provision of better-quality and more user-friendly platforms for collection and sharing of information, best practices, and data.** The capacity of CSOs and other stakeholders to collect better-quality and more user-friendly data and share best practices, and to make such information publicly available in a timely manner, must also be strengthened.
- **Increased protection of civic spaces,** including with regard to safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms and to upholding the credibility of independent institutions. This should also include efforts to help develop explicit indicators and methodologies for quantifiably measuring civil space, in an effort to counter narratives from repressive governments who could otherwise refute other independent assessments around civic space in their country.
- **Awareness raising within countries around SDG16 and accountability around the 2030 Agenda.** Many local and national level CSOs are already working to forward progress around peace, justice, and strong institutions, yet are unaware of SDG16, including its targets, processes, and bodies. Coordination of workshops, such as those being conducted by the TAP Network in 12 countries around the globe, will help to educate and train civil society about how to better forward their SDG16 work.

This list of recommendation is by no means exhaustive but provides a concrete starting point for investments. Many other actions can and should be taken by the international community to fully address the capacity needs and gaps of civil society working on SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda more broadly.

# Policy Recommendations on SDG16+

## Introduction

The next two sections of this report provide summaries of the key recommendations and broad calls to action around reporting on SDG16+ and on accelerating action and implementation from the preceding chapters, as well as those made directly in the Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+. These recommendations and action calls are divided into those that can be applied at the national level and the global level.

## Recommendations for the National Level

### *Reporting on SDG16+*

- **Creating a formal space for CSO spotlight reporting:** Governments alone cannot be the primary sources on and much less the sole evaluators of the quality of their governance. Without objective, empirical reporting from all qualified sources on the status of the many ambitious objectives of 2030 Agenda – all of which require public trust, based on publicly available and reliable information – progress on the SDGs cannot be measured, and will not be achieved. No official forum exists for collecting and analyzing the findings of CSO spotlight reports, nor is there a mechanism to hold governments accountable where gaps and challenges are found. 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.
- **Supporting additional research** in order to guarantee the quality of the research.
- In terms of advocacy outcomes and policy impact, **improving coordination and a clear vision for how parallel reports can most effectively contribute to the attainment of the SDGs** will play a critical role in maximising their potential.
- **Inclusive processes for developing a report collectively**, which contribute to knowledge exchange and solidarity across the disparate community of CSOs working on SDG16+ issues. Different approaches can use different actors, multiple data sources, and leverage other campaigns to collect data to monitor and take action to hold decision-makers to account. By supporting organizations and individuals to find their own ways to make progress towards achieving SDG16, these approaches represent a highly practical means of increasing both awareness and action on this pivotal Goal.
- **Early development of reports**, ideally nine months before the HLPF.
- **Support for further data collection**, especially in places where data collection capacities are limited and/or in insecure contexts. Organizations, especially international agencies, must be more willing to share data or statistics with civil society. Going forward, UN agencies and Member States must take into account non-governmental data sources in all their evaluations of progress towards SDG16, specifically those used in civil society SDG16 spotlight reports.

### *Accelerating Action and Implementation*

- **Establish a formal platform to collect, showcase, and review commitments**—The TAP Network has already established an informal platform for civil society commitments, but a formal platform, managed by the UN or another global body, is needed in order to encourage and support the commitments of various stakeholders.

This platform should be accompanied by an official monitoring mechanism in order to hold stakeholders, specifically national governments, accountable.

- **National Implementation:** Governments should each develop an overarching and cross-cutting National Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda and ensure that agreed processes are developed for redesigning existing policies and/or ensuring that new policies and programmes developed embed the SDG targets, and especially those of SDG16. More official analysis needs to be carried out regarding the interlinkages between the various SDGs and the institutional implications at national levels of addressing such linkages in an integrated way. Governments should develop a “whole of government” governance architecture, as this is essential to accelerate the implementation and realization of the SDGs. National Oversight mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda and its individual Goals should be created through establishing multi-stakeholder national SDG working groups. The role of oversight bodies such as the national parliaments in monitoring SDG implementation should also be strengthened. Governments must ensure that public institutions such as election bodies, national human rights institutions (NHRI) and anti-corruption agencies are fully engaged at the national level in the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Sub-national implementation:** Governments should translate and integrate SDG16 at a sub-national level via decentralization and de-concentration reforms, and through public administrative and public financial reform to local and provincial authorities. Local government systems need to become more effective and efficient, with more political and financial autonomy so enable the localization of SDGs at district and sub-district levels.
- **Governance:** Countries that are not already members should consider joining the Open Government Partnership and adhering to the commitments that membership entails, as this is seen to have been a very important step in pushing the United Kingdom towards achieving many of the targets of SDG16.
- **Participation:** Effective VNR-related outreach and consultative mechanisms should be created to ensure that inputs and recommendations from all stakeholders, including CSOs and development partners, will contribute to the official VNR and to national-level SDG implementation.
- **Enabling Environment:** Governments should strengthen a supportive, enabling environment for civil society actors to actively engage in SDG monitoring and evaluation, including in reporting processes.
- **Human Rights:** Human rights and fundamental freedoms should be strengthened at the national level and awareness promoted at local as well as provincial government levels, so that human rights defenders and victims of repression and abuse are protected, as is required by SDG16. Governments should encourage and facilitate civil society engagement in monitoring and evaluation of UN treaty bodies at the national and international levels (including drafting of civil society reports and participation in reporting processes before international treaty bodies) should be strengthened.
- **Data:** Governments everywhere should take the necessary steps to ensure a systematic data collection process and the development of relevant data analysis and storage platforms at national level. Data gaps need to be identified and addressed as quickly as possible for better policy formulations and realization of the SDGs at all levels. A reliable national SDG database system needs to be created with the consent of all related stakeholders including CSOs and government departments. Government must recognize and accept the results of citizen-led data initiatives. This could be done by using both qualitative and quantitative data in national monitoring reports.
- **Public Access to Information:** National governments must guarantee the right to transparent, accurate, timely, and relevant public information, so that all development actors can fulfill their role. Clear information in citizen's language which is updated frequently should be ensured so that these SDG data platforms become increasingly known and used, not only by governments and experts, but also by CSOs, the academy, and citizens.
- **Bottom-up approaches** should be utilized in working with communities to identify pressure points, root causes of violence and crime, and to realign federal, provincial/territorial and municipal investment towards evidence-based prevention programs.
- Civil society should **evaluate its “value offer”** in relation to the implementation of the SDGs and assume a social role through recognizing themselves as co-responsible actors of development and not merely as executors of

projects and resources.

- **"Partnerships for Knowledge" should be recognized and supported by governments** with the aim of promoting and recognizing "social innovation" and specific, valuable forms of cultural knowledge including traditional indigenous knowledge.
- **Further national capacity building and awareness raising support for civil society and other stakeholders**, including the development of tools and resources to support SDG16, as well as the coordination of national workshops and trainings, keeping in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all template for action. Support is needed to strengthen institutions tasked with monitoring progress. Opportunities to exchange and learn from other good practices regionally and globally
- **Awareness, inclusion, and active participation:** A significant increase in efforts by governments is needed to raise broad awareness about SDG16 and SDGs in general, and the VNR process in particular is an important first step to address this. To take this forward a key requirement is increased inclusion of and meaningful, inclusive coordination and partnership with civil society and other stakeholders, particularly the most marginalized. Governments should involve a broad range of CSOs including women and youth from the start in the elaboration and implementation of development strategies and their monitoring. This requires an open and secure environment for CSOs, particularly those working in crisis areas and conflict zones. Support is needed for ensuring effective inclusion of civil society and grassroots justice defenders in SDG16 planning, budgeting, and implementation processes.
- **Coordinated implementation:** At a structural level, there is a lack of coordinated implementation of policies and actions to achieve SDG16 and related national developmental targets. One way to address coordination issues is to adopt a national SDGs implementation agenda. National development plans should include SDG targets that are contextualized to the country's needs and priorities. This needs to be translated to the various agencies, institutionalized at all levels and translated into local languages.
- **Integrated Implementation:** There is an urgent need to develop fully integrated approaches and strategies for peacebuilding and conflict prevention issues. Linking SDG16 with other SDGs and investing in adequate infrastructures, including infrastructures for peace and access to justice in a coherent, integrated manner, will contribute to sustainable development and peace.

## Recommendations for the Global Level

Given that this report has largely focused on efforts that have been taken at the national level to support reporting and action on SDG16+, the following recommendations have been extracted from the Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+. **“Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+” (Rome Declaration)** outlines key messages, principles, recommendations, and a broad call-to-action from civil society collectively around SDG16+.

*Below are the summaries of the Rome Declaration’s global recommendations and calls-to-action for reporting and accelerating action and implementation on SDG16+.*

Civil society calls on all actors - and especially Member States and international agencies - to fulfil their commitments and accelerate action to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Between now and the next time SDG16 is reviewed, civil society expects to see progress in the following areas:

### **Pursue integrated approaches and interlinkages for inclusive results**

1. Ensure that all national development plans and international development support integrate and prioritize all relevant SDG16+ targets.
2. Support local and subnational capacities of different stakeholders and communities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including but not limited to: alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (such as inclusive mediation process that include views of local populations affected by conflict on issues such as land rights); the implementation of inclusive peace agreements; and efforts to promote a culture of non-violence and peace through education.
3. Ensure universal, timely, and affordable people-centered approaches to access to justice so that “everyone is really equal before the law”; and work collaboratively and effectively through formal and informal justice systems to ensure equal access to justice for all by promoting legal empowerment.
4. Step up support to effective, transparent, and accountable institutions, with particular attention to increased political empowerment of vulnerable groups in decision-making positions at all levels of governance.
5. Improve and adopt domestic laws and develop and implement holistic, people-centered strategies connecting SDG16+ to national action plans to implement *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*<sup>10</sup> and *UNSC Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security*.<sup>11</sup>
6. Undertake multi-stakeholder and gender and youth sensitive conflict analyzes leading to better alignment and joint actions to prioritize and address corruption.
7. Support participatory budget-making and representative, accountable institutions locally, including banning arms exports to parties to a conflict.
8. Take into account local views and capacities, protect civil society’s legitimacy, include new stakeholders such as religious and customary leaders and faith-based groups, and comprise a meaningful participation and decision-making of women, children, young people, minorities, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups.

### **Mobilize and scale up commitments and investments**

1. Come to the 2019 HLPF and SDG Summit with new meaningful, concrete, and ambitious commitments on how to accelerate progress on SDG16+ implementation in their contexts.

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<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council S/RES/1325. *Security Council resolution 1325 [on women and peace and security]*. 2000.

<sup>11</sup> UN Security Council S/RES/2250. *Security Council resolution 2250 [on youth, peace and security]*. 2016.

2. Scale up investments to civil society and grassroots approaches that respect their independence towards implementing the SDG16+ agenda by increasing global aid flows and the percentage of ODA, national budgets, and sector-specific funding, with a particular emphasis on the most fragile contexts, addressing human security needs, promoting access to justice and legal empowerment efforts, and putting the furthest behind first.
3. End the increase of military spending on security at the expense of peace, human rights, and justice. Conflict prevention and peace funding should be given prioritization over spending on defense and militarization.
4. Revise budgeting processes to provide overall support to SDG16+ priority areas and ensure that these processes are inclusive and participatory.
5. Create an “SDG16+ Challenge Fund” to help support civil society organizations working at the grassroots level to advance the ambitions of the agenda.
6. Prioritize the curbing of illicit financial flows, including offshore tax evasion and tax avoidance, and the promotion of tax justice in line with the commitments to Financing For Development made in the Addis Ababa Agreement.<sup>12</sup>
7. Catalyze private sector investments and innovations to advance SDG16+ priorities in line with relevant international standards and agreements according to human rights principles.

### **Increase capacity building for implementation**

1. Improve capacity building for civil society to address gaps around data collection, monitoring and spotlight reporting on SDG16, awareness raising, and inclusion in national VNR, public policy, and budgeting processes.<sup>13</sup>
2. Engage local and grassroots civil society that otherwise are difficult to reach and mobilize, buttressing existing civil society resources and tools to enable these local actors to support SDG16+ implementation local levels.<sup>14</sup>
3. Ensure core, ongoing, and sustained financial support for CSOs to support capacity building for implementation.
4. Recognize the critical role civil society can play in capacitating and strengthening the ability of Member States and other actors to implement SDG16+ commitments.

### **Strengthen data, monitoring, and accountability**

1. Review SDG16 annually at the HLPF, similar to SDG17, given its cross-cutting nature underpinning the whole 2030 agenda.
2. Provide a platform for the collection of SDG “Spotlight Reports” from civil society, and include these reports as official inputs into VNR processes at the HLPF.
3. Include non-official data sources alongside official data sources in the formal global and national monitoring of SDG16 implementation, including in efforts to track progress in regard to leaving no one behind.
4. Support the IAEG-SDG’s proposed additional official indicators on 16.3 on civil justice, 16.6 on trust in public institutions and 16.10 on fundamental freedoms.
5. Ensure that transparent, accountable, and independent institutional mechanisms are set up to monitor the effective implementation of ratified regional and international instruments.
6. Develop practical analytical and operational guidance on how SDG16+ can best foster impact for other SDGs.
7. Encourage the private sector to address systemic accountability issues businesses create around corruption, stolen asset recovery, tax evasion, extractive industries, transparency, and ethical investment.

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<sup>12</sup> UNDESA. Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda). 2015.

<sup>13</sup> TAP Network. “Civil Society Capacity Development for SDG16: Gaps, Challenges and Recommendations” Forthcoming, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Such as the Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit, Advocacy: Justice and the SDGs and the SDG Accountability Handbook

## Promote meaningful and inclusive participation and partnerships

1. Create mechanisms to allow inclusive and participatory policy-making on all SDG16+ related national, regional, and global policies.<sup>15</sup> This includes integrating civil society and other stakeholders within the range of sustainable development activities - from planning and budgeting conversations to processes seeking social cohesion, lasting peace, and justice.
2. Encourage and promote meaningful participation of civil society in national reporting processes and include its inputs into official government analyzes.
3. Create meaningful opportunities for civil society working at the local and grassroots levels, especially from the Global South, to engage and have a voice in key policy fora on implementing the 2030 Agenda.

## Protect civil society and expand civic space

1. Expand civil society space and create an enabling environment in which civil society can freely and safely operate and assemble, in line with the 2016 *UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Civil Society Space*<sup>16</sup>, especially in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.
2. Protect all human rights and freedoms, including full access to information for all in line with international standards.
3. Secure protections for human rights and justice defenders by monitoring and reporting attacks with input from civil society, formally recognizing these actors, and ending impunity against attacks.
4. Respect the independence of civil society actors, human rights defenders, and justice defenders to drive accountability for the sustainable development agenda, including on critical issues and ensure the safeguarding of these groups.
5. End persecution and harassment of civil society for engaging on SDG16+ issues and accountability mechanisms, such as the Voluntary National Reviews.

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. The Ulaanbaatar Democracy Forum on SDG16+ global mechanism with a focus on the Asia region that took place in February 2019.

<sup>16</sup> UN Resolution A/HRC/RES/32/31. UN Human Rights Council, Civil society space. 2016.



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