TAP NETWORK
Transparency, Accountability &
Participation for 2030 Agenda

Beyond Voluntary National Reviews: Approaches and Methodologies for [Civil Society/Parallel/Shadow/Spotlight Reporting] on SDG16

A paper from the Transparency, Accountability & Participation (TAP) Network

I. Introduction

Recognizing the critical importance of civil society to contribute assessments of progress towards SDG16, this TAP Network paper on SDG16 [civil society/parallel/shadow/spotlight reporting] provides some initial guidance on how to prepare a national-level report on SDG16. Whilst there is no one size-fits-all approach to reporting on SDG16 issues, the TAP Network hopes that this paper will help guide civil society stakeholders to reflect on their own national priorities, as well as the state of SDG16 implementation in their countries, with the aim of supporting robust and comparable [civil society/parallel/shadow/spotlight reporting] in all countries in the years ahead.

Meaningful civil society participation in encouraging inclusive and open SDG16 implementation and follow-up and review and accountability will be critical to ensuring that governments are responsive to the demonstrated needs of the diverse segments of each society. In many ways, civil society stakeholders serve as the most indispensable part of the measurement, monitoring and accountability framework for the SDGs, as they often provide a critical link between governments and stakeholders. Nationally and locally-focused civil society stakeholders can therefore play a key role in monitoring and review processes at the national level. Working in constructive ways with governments will be important to doing this, ideally by building trust and rapport so that governments see civil society as partners to be engaged for the benefit of the overall agenda. Providing [civil society/parallel/shadow/spotlight reports] on SDG16 is just one of the many ways that civil society can continue to build this positive working relationship with governments in support of the SDGs. **You can find out more on SDG16 issues and ways to approach national-level advocacy in the TAP Network "Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit" at** www.tapnetwork2030.org/goal16

II. Guidelines for SDG16 civil society/parallel reporting

The following section provides an outline for any civil society stakeholder to consider utilizing when putting together a [civil society/parallel/shadow/spotlight report] on SDG16 in your country. Additionally, you will find more detailed guidance on how to approach drafting each section of this report, including some key questions for you to consider answering and other relevant information you might find useful to steer you through this drafting process.

Proposed Outline for SDG16 [civil society/parallel/shadow/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 SDG16 Implementation / Follow-up**
   a. Assessment of civil society space around the SDGs (and in general)
   b. Challenges and recommendations

1. Executive Summary

- Present the synthesis of your most important findings and recommendations. Keep in mind that many readers may only read this section of the report. Mention that this report provides an independent account of the government's progress towards certain SDG targets.
- Include a short explanation of the SDG process so far in your country and provide the main findings from the report itself.
- Summarize the key recommendations that you have outlined for spurring additional progress on these 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 also be relevant to note some key challenges related to SDG16 work in your country, and ways to overcome some of these challenges.
- This section should ideally span roughly 1 page, but should not be longer than 2 pages.

2. Introduction:

a. This introductory section should include background and context on why your organization is drafting this report. It is also important to outline the scope of what you'll be reviewing, and why you feel the report is necessary and how it will contribute. This section can also include information or reflections of your organization on your country's most recent Voluntary National Review (VNR) on SDG progress. Finally, it may also be relevant to begin this section with a brief summary of the 2030 Agenda and SDG16, as it may be important to help readers understand the context of the report, if they are unaware of the 2030 Agenda.

b. It is also important to outline the methodology and approach that you are using to draft this report. A short one to three paragraph description of the methodology is important to help the reader understand how you went about your analysis throughout the report, and will lend significant credibility to the report and the organization itself. Without outlining this clearly, the reader might otherwise be able to question the validity of your analyses.

c. This section could also include an initial introduction and review of current government commitments to SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda. This could include institutional mechanisms created to coordinate government action towards the SDGs and SDG16 or relevant policies or laws that your government has in place that works to advance SDG16 progress. Remember: Many laws, policies, processes or institutions might not be specifically aimed at "achieving SDG16" or the targets within, but they can still contribute significantly to this end.

d. You may also find it relevant to consider reviewing your country's progress against some of the underpinning commitments of the SDGs, including but not limited to:
    -   Universality (the principle that commits all countries, developed and developing, to achieving the 2030 Agenda),
    -   "Leaving no one behind"
    -   "Reaching those furthest behind first"
    -   Special focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized people
    -   "realize the human rights of all"
    -   Integration and policy coherence.
    -   Justice, transparency and equality for all

e. **Brief introduction**
    i.   Create a one to two paragraph introduction to summarize what will be discussed under this section.

f. **Assessment of frameworks**
    i.   The purpose of this section is to assess the constitutional, legal and legislative frameworks and the policies that have been formally established within your country. For this section, you will assess various legal frameworks or laws/policies in your countries that are related to the issues that you'll be reviewing for this report. In this case, the existence of legal frameworks or laws/policies on these issues is the first indicator for measuring progress. However, it is also important to review the robustness of these legal frameworks, and various mechanisms that they might have for engaging with

governmental actors and stakeholders. Reviewing these frameworks and laws can also track a country's progress on introducing and improving key policies and legal provisions over time. Reviews of these legal frameworks and policies will vary depending on the issues you intend to cover in this report.

g. **Challenges and recommendations**
   i. Based on the above review 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.
   ii. Based on these challenges, it is important to provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to move progress forward on the issues you're covering in this report. This assessment of the current state of legal and legislative frameworks and policies, to what your government needs to do to "successfully" achieve progress on certain issues, can be used as a "gap analysis" for further advocacy work.

Key questions to consider answering in this section:

1. *Which government body or bodies are in charge of the implementation of the national SDG implementation process, and in particular concerning the implementation of SDG 16?*
2. *Has your country's current political leadership made public declarations about your issues 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 issues?*
4. *Have there been significant reforms or advances in the fight your issues in the past two years?*
5. *Is there an enabling space for civil society in monitoring the implementation and the commitment of SDGs, particularly at the grassroots level?*

For more information on legal and legislative frameworks and policies, and their relation to SDG16, read the TAP Network's Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit at *www.tapnetwork2030.org/goal16*

3. Review of Implementation

a. **Brief introduction**
   i. Create a one to two paragraph introduction to summarize what will be discussed under this section.

b. **Assessment of progress**
   i. This section will attempt to highlight some of the important issues related to implementation of laws and policies – including both "official" implementation by your government, as well as related "societal" issues (e.g. problems with bribery) – in your country to achieve progress on the issues you're covering in this report. For this, it is important to consider an overarching analysis of the entire system of implementation in a country – such as legal and legislative frameworks and policies (as covered in the section above), executive leadership and action from heads of state/government, civil society contributions, etc. Is it

working? Is it failing? And why? This section can also be used to compare your own analysis of progress on your issues, compared to what your government has reported on through its latest Voluntary National Review (VNR).

ii. While some degree of subjective analysis on implementation is ok and inevitable for these reports, it is critical that these analyses should be founded and supported by robust and verifiable indicators and data sources. This data can come from governments, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and other public institutions, academia and other independent research institutions, NGOs and civil society, and from multilateral institutions or bodies such as National Human Rights Institutions. Without strong, robust and reliable/verifiable data to support your analysis on these issues, your reviews and the credibility of the report itself can easily be dismissed by the government and any other readers as illegitimate and unfounded, which can work to undermine the great advocacy work that your organization undertakes otherwise. All of these references to data sets throughout the report should be consistently and clearly cited using footnotes or endnotes.

iii. Your analyses should also ideally involve non-official data sources (including those from the UN, other multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, research institutions, academia, the private sector and citizens) as well as survey-based citizen perception and experiential data. Ensuring that you have citizens voices in your report, helps you ensure that your analysis is people-centered, and fully reflective of people's views beyond your own organization. Furthermore, surveys are shown to best meet the criterion of being easy to understand and are as universal and aspirational as administrative or treaty data. Civil society and academia has considerable experience in undertaking systematic and regular surveys for the purposes of assisting governments to monitor the effectiveness of programs. Harnessing this data for your reports not only help build the case for utilizing these types of data sources, but help ensure that your reports take into considerations and perceptions of progress from citizens themselves. For more information on the role of non-official data, read the TAP Network paper on this topic here: http://www.tapnetwork2030.org/our-work/sdg-goal-16-indicators/

iv. If you're looking for indicators and corresponding data sources to measure progress for your analysis, you can start with the indicators and data available through the SDG16 Data Initiative at www.sdg16.org . This platform provides non-official data on all of the "official" global indicators for SDG16, as well as select complementary indicators relevant for all SDG16 issues. In the case that data is not widely or publicly available for these indicators, other data sources could potentially be used as a proxy to measure progress against these indicators as well.

c. **Challenges and recommendations**

i. Based on the above review of the implementation of SDG16 and your issues 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.

    ii. Based on these challenges, it is important to provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to move progress forward on the issues you're covering in this report. This assessment of where your government currently is in implementing SDG16, to what your government needs to do to "successfully" achieve progress on certain issues, can be used as a "gap analysis" for further advocacy work. To further this, it might be useful to identify what kinds of gaps there might be. For example, there c be gaps in ambition and coverage, between targets and policies, between policies and implementation, between policy implementation and change?

Key questions to consider answering in this section:

1. *What is the current SDG16 process in your country? Outline how has your government taken action related to the issues you work on, and how have they shown progress.*
2. *How has your government reported its progress on the SDG16 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 and SDG implementation plan in order to implement the Agenda 2030 and/or SDG16 at the national level?*
5. *Has the development of national SDG implementation plans relating to SDG 16 been open and inclusive?*
6. *Are there any important issues which are omitted or not adequately addressed in the official national report?*

4. Review of International Commitments (if applicable)

    a. Assessment of progress

        i. For this section, you can consider if your country has joined various international conventions/initiatives relating to your issues, and what has been their role on these bodies? This section's analysis should be very brief, unless they have play a major role in initiating it or expanding this international work. Include if they have made major changes because of joining this international convention/initiative, and if the body had made recommendations for changes in your country. Do the action plans of the entities have any SDG related commitments?

        ii. Other international conventions/initiatives that you might consider include, but are not limited to: UN Human Rights Council, UN Convention against Corruption, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Open Government Partnership (OGP), Community of Democracies, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), etc.

    b. Challenges and recommendations

        i. It may also be relevant for you to outline any potential challenges and recommendations for your country in regards to any international commitments

5. Civil Society participation in SDG16 Implementation / Follow-up

    a. Assessment of civil society space around the SDGs (and in general)

        i. In the 2030 Agenda, governments recognized the role of civil society in helping spur implementation of the SDGs, and have committed to conduct regular "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent" reviews of progress, which draws upon contributions of civil society and a wide range of stakeholders. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have the ability to influence policy decisions through advocating, educating, mobilizing and analyzing, and have demonstrated this engagement throughout the development of the 2030 Agenda – and particularly in regards to SDG16. Experience has shown that ongoing monitoring, review and recalibration of such plans will be critical to ensuring that governments stay on track and deliver real progress.

        ii. Paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines a list of guiding principles for follow-up and review by governments, which will be helpful to utilize as a basis for your assessment of your national follow-up and review processes.

        iii. Paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda calls upon all stakeholders to "report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda." Consequently, you may also consider including information regarding your own organization's contributions on this front, or more broadly how civil society in your country is mobilizing to support the 2030 Agenda, including through this report. Since the language in Paragraph 89 is so broad and vague, the approach you take here is really up for your own interpretation to how to best report in this regards.

    b. Challenges and recommendations

        i. Based on the above review of the 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 make progress to open up space for civil society.

        ii. Based on these challenges, it is important to provide recommendations on what is needed in your country to create and open additional spaces for civil society and civic engagement.

Key questions to consider answering in this section:

1. *Does civil society have the opportunity to provide input to the SDG process?*
2. *Has your government set national-level indicators to track country-level progress on SDG16? 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 SDG16 targets will fit into implementation of the national SDG plan?*
4. *Are there any entry points for these SDG16 [civil society/parallel/shadow/spotlight reports], for your government to formally consider your progress assessments and recommendations?*
5. *Have there been legislative amendments or policies formulated that are in line with SDG 16 at National Level?*