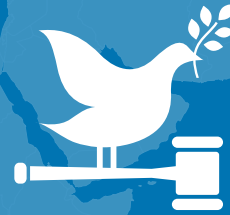




16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



SDG16 in VNRs and Spotlight Reports

Reporting on Progress, Reflecting on Inclusive Accountability Measures
and Recommendations for going ahead

SDG 16 in VNRs and Spotlight Reports

Reporting on Progress, Reflecting on Inclusive Accountability
Measures and Recommendations for going ahead



This is a joint publication by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Transparency, Accountability and Participation Network for the 2030 Agenda (TAP Network). The comparative analysis was undertaken by a senior sustainable development consultant on behalf of, and in collaboration with, the GIZ SDG 16 Focal Person, Anna-Maria Heisig, and the TAP Network Coordinator, John Romano. Gratitude is expressed towards Elisabeth Sweeney and Marius von Frankenhorst for their dedicated support in writing this study.

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Abbreviations

A4SD	Action for Sustainable Development
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEPEI	Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional
CGF	core government functions
CSO	civil society organisation
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPPAC	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
GPSDD	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
GSDR	Global Sustainable Development Report
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLDC	Land-locked Developing Country
LNOD	Leaving no one behind
LRG	Local and Regional Government
NDP	National Development Plan
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
P4R	Partners for Review
SAIIA	South African Institute of International Affairs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TAP	Transparency, Accountability and Participation Network for the 2030 Agenda
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

Executive summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, aims to initiate a fundamental transformation towards achieving sustainable development by 2030. The transformation will require effective, transparent, accountable and participatory governance and peaceful societies as laid out in SDG 16. This goal has a fundamental role to play in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a whole, and has been recognised as both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development. In 2019, there was a special focus on the transformative potential of SDG 16, due to the review of SDG 16 by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

While governments have a leading role to play, the achievement of SDG 16 depends on a ‘whole of society’ approach. To this end, the report evaluates VNR and spotlight reports submitted to the HLPF 2019 for a selected group of countries. In view of the 2030 Agenda’s core principles to enhance participatory, inclusive and multi-stakeholder approaches, the analysis looks at whether spotlight and VNR reports relate to one another, and if so how. It identifies the main commonalities and differences between the perspectives of governments and civil society.

The assessment of the reporting on SDG 16 in spotlight and VNR reports indicates that a wide spectrum of approaches has been adopted in the areas analysed; i) key features – SDG 16 reporting, ii) mainstreaming of SDG 16, iii) stakeholder engagement, iv) statistics and data and v) follow-up and iv) next steps. While spotlight and VNR reports both cover a wide range of information, reporting structures differ significantly. Moreover, there was little overlap in terms of the specific content reported in the countries considered. The difference in structures makes it difficult to compare reports. Although many guidelines have been drawn up for both VNR and spotlight reports, greater harmonisation and/or integrated reporting approaches would make it easier to assess progress from the perspectives of governments and civil society respectively.

Our analysis revealed more in-depth reporting on SDG 16 in spotlight reports than in VNR reports ¹. One exception was reporting on specific mainstreaming efforts including legislative measures and policies adopted, and institutional structures established. While these all contribute to achieving certain aspects of SDG 16, little information is provided on overall strategic approaches to achieving SDG 16, including interlinkages and/or trade-offs with other SDGs. While spotlight reports generally provide more detailed information on the broader connections of SDG 16 and SDG 16+, more analysis, investment and action is needed to accelerate the implementation of SDG16 and the agenda as a whole. This impression is reinforced by several global SDG assessment reports.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, governments and CSOs should continue their efforts to get a broad range of stakeholders involved on a consistent basis. Some good practices are presented in the reports, but ongoing and meaningful stakeholder engagement is required to ensure that all voices are heard, as well as enhancing policy coherence and addressing the lack of awareness of SDG 16 that has also been identified as a problem in various global SDG progress and assessment reports. Continued investment is needed

¹ This is partly because some spotlight reports focus specifically on SDG 16.

at all levels to ensure and step up civil society participation in monitoring, reporting, follow-up and in implementation processes. This includes activities in the context of the ongoing HLPF reform process, regional follow-up and review efforts, and activities at the local level.

Overall, spotlight and VNR reports agree on the challenges involved in finding reliable SDG-related statistics and data, and point to the need to close data gaps and identify high quality, disaggregated data to monitor progress on the SDGs. Spotlight reports provide in-depth information at the target level, and many include survey results or provide examples of data collection efforts that can contribute to VNR processes and/or complement overall monitoring efforts. To address data availability issues, non-official data sources, including civil society, can provide complementary data that can be used to triangulate reports and will help provide a more realistic picture of society.

In terms of next steps, both regarding further mainstreaming of SDG 16 as well as repeated reporting, useful recommendations are provided in many of the spotlight reports. In some countries, post-HLPF feedback is provided by civil society, which can help make reporting more systematic. To ensure continuity between reporting and review processes, mechanisms and approaches must provide for comparability and knowledge sharing between VNR and spotlight reports.

In view of the 2030 Agenda's emphasis on inclusive, participatory, multi-stakeholder and partnership approaches, taking account of stakeholder perspectives can help advance the realisation of SDG 16 at the national and local level. Also, in response to the findings of recent global assessments of the progress made on the SDGs as a whole and SDG 16 in particular, reporting should be inclusive. Spotlight and VNR reporting can be mutually beneficial. CSO perspectives can inform VNR processes and vice versa.

Given the knowledge generated by the two reporting processes, ways of leveraging their findings ought to be considered. Institutionalisation or a more structured approach to VNR and spotlight reporting on SDG 16 could strengthen inclusive, participatory, multi-stakeholder and partnership approaches. This means that VNR and spotlight reports for a country should not be produced in a vacuum, but that each should benefit from the knowledge generated by both processes.

Given the current non-official status of spotlight reporting, and in view of the investment and value involved in these reporting processes, there is a need to explore ways of better utilising and sharing inputs and feedback. One option would be to establish a platform or a database for spotlight reports, particularly on SDG 16.

In the context of enhanced integration of VNR and spotlight reporting, contributions from other relevant stakeholder groups could also be included. Linking not only government and civil society reporting but also feedback from the private sector, to give one example, would facilitate a comprehensive follow-up and review of all main stakeholder groups. This would foster inclusive monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and support the transformation required to achieve sustainable development.

Key recommendations

- Putting government and civil society reporting into perspective yields informative insights and good practices regarding the implementation of goals and principles of the 2030 Agenda and may thus contribute to a more holistic picture about national SDG implementation, produce more citizen-oriented measures for follow-up and improve global learning.
- A comparison of the content covered by Voluntary National Reviews and Spotlight Reports, including priorities, challenges and opportunities to achieve SDG 16, indicates that report approaches and formats differ significantly. In order to identify entry points for collective follow-up measures, **institutionalized approaches to inclusive reporting, including integration of findings from Spotlight Reports into VNR reports, can help realize an evident mutual benefit and open up avenues for effective stakeholder contributions.**
- Given the transversal effects of SDG 16 as both an objective and an enabler for sustainable development at large, the commitment to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies is all the more important. Against this background, **reporting, monitoring and review about SDG16-related issues should be scaled up considerably.** This includes specific measures to mainstream SDG 16 into development plans, the collection and use of data, including non-official sources, and the design of targeted policies with a focus on LNOB principles: **The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in these core processes is in itself a contribution to achieve SDG 16.**
- In this vein, and beyond reporting mechanisms, the **establishment of fora or platforms to enable civil society representatives to regularly engage with government on issues relevant for sustainable development** can help coordinate civil society engagement and facilitate constructive dialogue between government and society altogether.
- Good practices feature in both reporting processes and are featured in this report to great detail. With a view on procedures, national dialogue and learning will greatly benefit from **reports that are regular, evidence-based, methodologically consistent, building on previous reporting cycles and reflect on specific policy plans, measures or programs.**
- Good practices from both reporting processes are worthwhile disseminating for the purpose of global learning. **Countries should be encouraged, and international organizations should help strengthen, the discussion of genuine experiences:** lessons learned should go beyond mechanisms of stakeholder engagement to focus on the transformation achieved through inclusive and participatory processes.
- **Multi-stakeholder reporting processes in particular may be encouraged through dedicated awareness raising, peer exchange and global learning using platforms that are already existing,** such as the HLPF, regional fora for sustainable development organized by Regional Economic Commissions, or expert group meetings for specific SDGs.
- UN agencies, implementing agencies for development cooperation, international organizations and networks should **increase capacity building at national and local levels** to improve and sustain inclusive reporting processes as a form of accountability and good governance principles.
- While VNR processes have formal reporting structures, mechanisms and (regularly updated) guidelines, **civil society should strive to increase the comparability of spotlight reports.** This may entail the development of joint guidance on reporting, including templates, the collection, dissemination and analysis of Spotlight Reports on dedicated platforms, as well as continued capacity building for civil society. UN agencies and international organizations should increase efforts to support such activities.

Last but not least, **this study is a piloting effort to enable a structured and analytical comparison between government and civil society reporting that should be continued and expanded:** a triangulation of global assessments, VNRs and Spotlight Reports on SDG 16 and beyond will not only provide a more holistic picture of national implementation efforts, but will be a unique contribution to global learning on achievements, challenges and opportunities that may be met with more targeted measures, including from UN agencies and international organizations.

1.0 Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, aims to initiate a fundamental transformation towards achieving sustainable development by 2030. The transformation will require effective, transparent, accountable and participatory governance and peaceful societies as laid out in SDG 16. This goal has a fundamental role to play in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a whole, and has been recognised as both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development. In 2019, there was a special focus on the transformative potential of SDG 16, due to the review of SDG 16 by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

The HLPF is the central forum for a follow-up and review mechanism that provides for voluntary reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda², which is largely based on the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). These reviews are government led and aimed to track progress on a country's respective SDG implementation. Governments are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews, drawing on contributions from civil society, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, 158 VNRs have been carried out.³ While government reports are at the centre of the follow-up and review process, civil society organisations (CSOs) are increasingly reporting on national implementation efforts in the form of spotlight reports.⁴ The reports provide feedback on national SDG implementation from the perspective of civil society, and are considered an unofficial mechanism for monitoring and holding governments accountable on SDG implementation.

While governments have a leading role to play, the achievement of SDG 16 depends on a 'whole of society' approach that engages all relevant stakeholders across and at all levels of government. To this end, the current report evaluates the VNR- and Spotlight Reports of a selected group of countries which have reported to the HLPF in 2019. A comparison of these reports aims to present and compare findings on the reporting on progress towards SDG 16 specifically and the broader Agenda. **A comparative approach is, to the best knowledge of the authors, the first study of this nature and yields valuable insights: the findings and reflections in the context of SDG 16 are necessary in order to gain better insight into the challenges and opportunities of its implementation.** This is particularly relevant given the enabling role of good governance and peaceful societies for sustainable development in general. At the same time, including analysis of Spotlight Reporting, as a means of independent monitoring on governance-related SDG monitoring and implementation, may specifically yield critical insights with regard to fostering peaceful societies, respect for human rights and the principle of 'Leaving No One Behind' (LNOB) from the directly affected stakeholder groups, respectively.

2 As agreed by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly after the adoption of the SDGs - UN Resolution 70/A/684: Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level. UN General Assembly, 2016, New York.

3 In 2016, 22 countries submitted a VNR to the HLPF. 43 countries reported in 2017, 46 in 2018, and 47 in 2019.

4 The term spotlight reports will be used here. Other commonly used terms include civil society reports, shadow reports, or parallel reports.

1.1 Scope of the analysis

This comparative analysis was undertaken by a senior sustainable development consultant on behalf of, and in close cooperation with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Transparency, Accountability and Participation Network for the 2030 Agenda (TAP Network). It aims to assess civil society reporting and compare this with government reporting on SDG 16. By comparing these reports we can assess how the reporting practices correspond to one another, as well as identifying any gaps between policy formulation and implementation. **The analysis also assesses challenges and opportunities highlighted by government and civil society, as well as good practices, next steps and recommendations provided in the reports.** It aims to make key recommendations on how to leverage the findings in these reporting processes so as to foster the inclusive and participatory implementation of SDG 16 and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

The analysis draws on the SDG 16 related reporting from a select focus group of countries by which both VNR and Spotlight reports have been prepared for the 2019 HLPF.⁵ As such, this focus group has been determined singularly by the availability of Spotlight Reports rather than subjective criteria. In some of the focus countries, two Spotlight Reports were prepared (Ghana, Serbia), which have both been included in the analysis. Based on these criteria, the analysis includes VNR- and Spotlight Reports from; Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Guatemala, Pakistan, Mauretania, Mongolia, Serbia, and the United Kingdom (UK).⁶

In order to assess and compare reporting on SDG 16, the VNR and spotlight reports were reviewed on the basis of a grid of questions that concentrated on the following areas:

- i) Key features – reporting on SDG 16
- ii) Mainstreaming SDG 16
- iii) Stakeholder engagement
- iv) Data and statistics
- v) Follow-up and next steps.

The analysis includes reflections and key observations relating to each of these areas, before going on to make a number of recommendations to be considered in future follow-up and review reporting on SDG 16.

All information presented in the comparative analysis is based on the contents of the selected VNR and spotlight reports available to the author, GIZ and the TAP Network. It also draws on literature and reports that analyse progress on the SDGs in general and SDG 16 in particular. It includes key findings of global VNR assessments, as well as relevant reports and global assessments. And it introduces guides and tools that have been developed to support follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and SDG 16.

The comparative analysis features key trends, best practices, needs and challenges laid out in the selected VNR and spotlight reports. References made to individual countries and examples cited throughout are intended for purely illustrative purposes and do not reflect any judgement, evaluation or political views. As far as possible, the report specifies the countries or reports highlighting specific initiatives.

⁵ See Annex I

⁶ Beyond these, Spotlight Reports from further countries, from the years 2018-2019, and partly with dedicated focus on SDG 16, have been analyzed by the authors. This includes Spotlight Reports from Benin, Brazil, El Salvador, Nepal and Somaliland, which have been presented at the 2019 HLPF. Where applicable, these findings are featured in this study and are highlighted. Overall, the findings are available for further analysis and may be requested from the authors.

1.2 SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

SDG 16 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. It is key to achieving the SDGs and has been identified as both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development.

SDG 16 consists of 12 targets that vary in scope (Box 1). While some targets have a specific focus, others express the broader principles of the 2030 Agenda. As a stand-alone goal, SDG 16's targets can be attributed to one of three key dimensions⁷ (see annex 1) as laid out below:

- Peaceful societies: Marked by low or no incidence of all forms of violence (target 16.1), violence against children (target 16.2) and arms flows (target 16.4).
- Just societies: Based on rule of law and access to justice (target 16.3), fighting illicit financial flows (target 16.4), and corruption and bribery (target 16.5).
- Inclusive societies: Based on effective, accountable and transparent institutions (target 16.6), inclusive participatory decision-making (target 16.7), participation in global governance (target 16.8), public access to information (target 16.10) and violence and prevention (target 16a).

Box 1, Goal 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Targets

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- 16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organised crime
- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance
- 16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- 16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime
- 16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

As already mentioned, SDG 16 plays an important part in the implementation of the Agenda as a whole. Besides the 12 targets relating to SDG 16, the 2030 Agenda includes another 24 targets that are directly linked to aspects of peace, justice and inclusion, i.e. SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reducing inequality), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 17 (partnerships to achieve the goals). The term SDG 16+ refers to the

⁷ Although this analysis is not based on these dimensions, further analysis of these aspects is suggested.

entirety of those 36 targets and, as such, is synonymous with the enabling and transversal effects of SDG 16 for the achievement of other SDGs and for the Agenda as a whole. These include further effective institutions, participatory decision-making, access to justice for all, reducing violence, tackling corruption and access to information. All these aspects are vital for achieving sustainable development.⁸

While SDG 16 commits governments to providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels, civil society has a critical role to play in monitoring and supporting the implementation of the Goal. To achieve SDG 16, however, an enabling environment is needed, along with government structures and mechanisms that enable civil society to operate and to support implementation and monitoring activities.

1.3 VNR reports

VNR reports form a fundamental part of the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda encourages countries to *‘conduct regular and inclusive review of progress at the national and subnational levels, which are country-led and country driven’* and states that reviews are *‘state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.’*⁹ A set of common reporting guidelines and a handbook for the preparation of VNR reports provided by the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and other UN agencies seek to support countries in conducting VNR review processes according to the guiding principles that govern the follow-up and review process at all levels (Box 2).

Box 2: Guidelines for VNR and SDG reporting

- United Nations Secretary-General’s [Voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews](#) at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). These guidelines seek to support countries in conducting VNRs in line with the guiding principles that govern the follow-up and review process at all levels. They were prepared in 2015, updated in 2017 to reflect lessons learned, and updated again in 2019, considering experience gained during the first cycle of the HLPF. They provide a framework for certain common elements within reports, while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt reporting to their own circumstance.
- The [handbook](#) for the preparation of the VNRs, 2020, United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs. The handbook supplements the voluntary common reporting guidelines and provides information on the steps countries may take when preparing VNRs.
- [Guidelines to support country reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals](#), 2017, United Nations Development Group. These guidelines represent the coherent support of UN country teams for the preparation of a national SDG report. While the SDG progress reports differ from VNR reports, these guidelines complement the voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs.
- [VNRs: Guidance on Reporting for SDG 16](#), SDG 16 Hub, Oslo Governance Centre, 2019
The guidance provides support to countries seeking to report on SDG 16, with guiding questions to help inform the VNR process, information on the context and integration into other aspects of national plans and practical examples of SDG 16 reporting. These guidelines are currently being updated in cooperation with the Global Alliance.

8 Enabling the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through SDG 16+ – Anchoring peace, justice and inclusion’, Global Alliance, 2019, p. 18.

9 RES/A/70/1§§ 79, 84.

These guidelines are voluntary in nature, meaning reports are not uniform or inherently comparable in terms of contents or format. Central to the reviews are the core principles of the 2030 Agenda such as universality, LNOB, integration, inclusiveness, and ownership. The review processes allow countries to map implementation efforts undertaken and review progress made, as well as planning appropriate policies, structures, and processes to follow-up efforts, and revising or putting in place new national development plans for achieving the SDGs. Apart from making a vital contribution to the implementation of the SDGs, the follow-up and review framework is intended to promote accountability to citizens, support active international cooperation and foster exchange, best practices and mutual learning.¹⁰

1.4 Spotlight reports

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, civil society reporting on the implementation of the SDGs has emerged in the form of spotlight reports. These reports, frequently prepared by (associations of) CSOs, often provide independent assessments of national and local SDG implementation efforts and offer a perspective that differs from official VNR reporting. **While there is no formalised approach to spotlight reporting, various guidelines and templates have been developed (Box 3).** The HLPF does not provide an official mechanism to submit, present and discuss Spotlight Reports. However, practice has shown that most of these reports have been presented in Side Events to the Forum.

The scope of spotlight reporting differs depending on the resources available, as well as the mandate and focus of the CSOs carrying out the assessments. Some spotlight reports cover all the SDGs, whereas others focus on specific SDGs or targets. Furthermore, the character of spotlight reports depends on the relations between national governments and society, specifically civil society.

As an unofficial mechanism for monitoring and holding governments accountable on SDG implementation, spotlight reporting is not formalised in the same way as VNR reporting. There is currently no official record of the number of spotlight reports produced, although unofficial platforms featuring spotlight reports do exist (Box 4).

Box 3: Unofficial platforms – spotlight reporting and civil society engagement

- ▶ The **TAP Network** hosts an unofficial platform for collecting and showcasing spotlight reports.
- ▶ Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD)'s unofficial platform features toolkits, reports and other documents on sustainable development, climate and environment and civil society engagement.
- ▶ Social Watch's unofficial platform publishes spotlight reports from 2016 onwards.

In general, spotlight reports help drive national government accountability for making progress on the SDGs. **The reports complement VNR reporting and provide critical assessments, information and feedback, demonstrating the value of civil society in the 2030 Agenda monitoring and review process at national level.**

¹⁰ Critical milestones toward coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, Report of the Secretary General, A/70/684, United Nations, 2016.

Box 4: Methodologies and guidelines for spotlight reporting and civil society engagement

The **Transparency Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network for the 2030 Agenda** has developed a number of guides, tools and methodologies that support spotlight reporting and other efforts to guide the implementation of SDG 16:

- ▶ **Empowering Civil Society for National Reporting and Action on SDG 16** This report offers a compilation of national civil society case studies and spotlight reports on SDG 16. It analyses a range of approaches and methodologies used by civil society, specifically with regard to drafting and disseminating 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.
- ▶ **Goal 16 Advocacy Toolkit** includes guidance and tips on contextualising Goal 16, as well as engaging with Goal 16 at national level in e.g. preparing gap analyses and supporting planning efforts, as well as supporting follow-up and monitoring for Goal 16.
- ▶ **SDG Accountability Handbook** is a capacity development source designed to help national-level civil society drive government accountability for the SDGs, and guide them through the practical steps to improved accountability for the 2030 Agenda in their country. It features a chapter on publishing civil society spotlight reports, including information of its importance and recommended approaches and methodologies that can be utilized.

Transparency International's Methodologies and Shadow Reporting Tool aims to enable civil society organisations to conduct an independent appraisal of their country's progress in fighting corruption, tackling illicit financial flows, and improving transparency and access to information in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It aims to help identify areas where the national anti-corruption system leaves room for improvement and to collect data and information that will serve as a basis for compiling a spotlight report. It i) provides a systematic approach to identify and prioritise corruption-related SDG 16 issues, ii) provides a baseline assessment of a country's anti-corruption framework, which can be used as a benchmark to monitor progress towards the SDG targets, iii) helps address problems inherent to the global indicator framework by proposing a range of alternative data sources and proxy indicators, iv) its findings can be used to engage government in using internationally recognised channels, such as VNRs, and v) it lends itself to the development of actionable recommendations, which can be used to engage with various stakeholders to suggest specific improvements.

The **Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD) Toolkit** aims to provide an opportunity for civil society organisations to review delivery of the SDGs in their country. The toolkit lays out key steps for national civil society coalitions, i) describing how to develop an inclusive national civil society process, ii) providing a template for a People's Scorecard on national delivery of the 2030 Agenda, and iii) explain how to use the scorecard to deliver transformation.

CIVICUS has developed methodologies to help civil society contribute to monitoring and to holding decision-makers accountable, three of which are laid out below:

- ▶ **The CIVICUS Monitor** is a research tool that provides close to real-time data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries. The data is generated in collaboration with civil society research partners and incorporates input from independent human rights evaluations. The monitor is an online portal that tracks conditions in countries. It is unique among international indexes as it combines several independent data sources, including CSOs and reports from national, regional and international CSOs.
- ▶ **The Data Shift** initiative, which sees global data generated on inclusive and responsive decision-making (SDG indicator 16.7.2),
- ▶ **The SPEAK! Campaign**, which sparks further action on indicator 16.7.2.

Forus International's Guidelines for CSO Shadow Reports: Monitoring the Implementation of Agenda 2030 at the National Level (2018) includes examples of civil society reports and key steps to follow when preparing and producing a civil society SDG report.

1.5 Global assessments and progress on SDG 16

A number of assessments and research on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda have been published since the SDGs were adopted in 2015. They include assessments of VNR reports and/or progress on the SDGs at the global or regional level, as well as assessments of progress and monitoring relating specifically to SDG 16 or SDG 16+. This chapter will first provide an overview of findings related to SDG 16 from official global reports, will then provide insights from voluntary national reports, and lastly highlight specifics from global reports with a dedicated focus on SDG 16.

SDG assessment reports

In addition to analyses of VNR reports, several global assessments analyse the status of SDG implementation, and provide feedback on Goal-specific progress. In 2019, some reports devoted detailed attention to the SDG 16, underscoring its importance for the achievement of sustainable development as a whole.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report and the SDG Progress Report issued by the UN Secretary-General¹¹ provide evidence-based feedback on the progress made on each SDG. On Goal 16 its 2019 edition¹² concludes that the Goal is still a long way from being realised. The report states that in recent years, no substantial advances have been made towards ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions at all levels, or increasing access to justice, among others. It states that more countries are investing in addressing human rights abuses and developing legislation and regulations that foster more open and just societies. It also underscores the adverse impact of conflict and other forms of violence on sustainable development.

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR),¹³ published in 2019, identifies key entry points where interlinkages can be leveraged and progress accelerated on all the SDGs. As its first lever, the report highlights governance and identifies several points on which a consensus exists in global sustainable development governance including: i) involving grassroots actors in processes towards inclusive, multi-scale politics, ii) identifying and supporting regimes and transformative alliances between traditional and new actors (governments, academia, science, citizens, cities, private sector) towards greater dynamism in transformative governance, iii) improving the ability to manage hard choices, build coordination and consensus and channel the necessary resources.¹⁴

The Sustainable Development Goals Report and the GSDR have found advances to be extremely uneven and note no substantial progress towards SDG 16 and ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening public institutions, and increasing access to justice. While many countries have in recent years increased efforts to introduce legislation to foster open and inclusive societies and uncover human rights violations, more efforts are needed globally to implement these mechanisms (Box 5).

11 Report of the Secretary-General on SDG Progress 2019. Special Edition, United Nations (2019).

12 The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019, United Nations, 2019.

13 Report of the Secretary-General on SDG Progress 2019. Special Edition, United Nations (2019).

14 'The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development. Global Sustainable Development Report 2019', United Nations, 2019, p. 30.

Box 5: Key findings of the Sustainable Development Goals Report and the GSDR

Peaceful societies

As one of the central challenges to achieving the 2030 Agenda in general and SDG 16 in particular, both reports point out that in 2018 more than 70 million people were displaced, fleeing war, persecution and conflict. This was the highest figure registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in almost 7 decades. These groups, which are particularly vulnerable to all forms of violence and non-inclusive decision-making, have largely sought shelter in some of the countries that are themselves most vulnerable to violent conflict or in post-conflict situations, i.e. least developed countries (LDCs) and land-locked developing countries (LLDCs). Although otherwise highly diverse, what is common to these countries are weak public institutions and a lack of access to basic human and civil rights. By 2030, it is estimated that 80% of the extremely poor will live in countries marked by violence and conflicts, with women and children being disproportionately harshly affected. Meanwhile, conflicts are increasingly tending to become protracted and to involve non-governmental, regional and international players. While (perceptions of) exclusion and inequalities caused by governments and institutions may foment social unrest in all countries, the prevalence of significant conflict represents the greatest challenge, and points out precisely where action is most urgently needed.

Just societies

Birth registration plays an essential part in ensuring individual rights and assuring people of access to justice and social services. While many regions have reached (near) universal registration rates, the global average stands at 73%. Only 46% of all children under five in sub-Saharan Africa have had their births registered. Official data suggests that 650 million children worldwide are excluded from society due to their lack of any legal identity. This applies specifically to access to justice, education, employment, health services, political participation and property rights. The justice gap currently affects 5 billion people globally. An estimated 80% of those involved do seek justice through informal mechanisms or traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. In 2018, a total of 39% of all countries had put in place a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) that was fully compliant with internationally agreed standards – seven countries more than in 2015. If growth continues at the same rate, only slightly more than half (54%) of all countries worldwide will have compliant NHRIs by 2030.

Inclusive societies

Political or legal limitations to civil liberties and civil rights are apparent in many countries, resulting in shrinking civic space, which is halting or even reversing moves to achieve equality, inclusion and sustainability. Some advances have been made regarding individual rights and access to information held by public institutions, with 125 countries introducing relevant legislation, at least 31 of them since 2013. Nevertheless, women remain disproportionately disadvantaged. 1,456 journalists and human right activists have been killed since 2015. Restrictions in place on civil society organisations in 83 countries make it difficult to found or operate organisations of this sort, and impact adversely on the right to freedom of assembly and the ability of organisations to access international funds. The inclusion and representation of women in public institutions has seen advances in some countries, while the representation of other groups, particularly youth, ethnic groups or people with disabilities, is less apparent.

The World Public Sector Report 2019¹⁵ includes a chapter on progress on the institutional dimensions of SDG 16. The report looks at national-level developments in relation to several concepts of Goal 16 including access to information, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, inclusiveness of decision-making processes and non-discrimination. It explores global trends in these areas, docu-

15 'World Public Sector Report', United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.

menting the availability of relevant information and the status of knowledge about the effectiveness of related policies and institutional arrangements in different national contexts. It also demonstrates how the institutional principles of SDG 16 have been informing the development of institutions with reference also to gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5).

In the People's Assembly Declaration¹⁶, civil society calls for accelerated action in the context of the Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+.¹⁷ It includes recommendations in the fields of peace and conflict, climate and environment, inequality, decent work and LNOB, gender, persons with disabilities and civic space. It highlights a need to involve and consult more diverse stakeholders, including marginalised groups, in peace, justice and governance processes at all levels. With reference to peace and justice, it calls on the international community to i) adopt the recommendations of the Rome Declaration, ii) meaningfully and substantially enact the women, peace and security agenda (WPS, 1325) by ensuring that women and civil society groups are included at all levels and in all tracks of peacebuilding and peace processes, iii) address the root causes of conflict and violence – including structural inequality, nationalism and autocratic governance – through meaningful investment and engagement with those most at risk, and iv) improve all instruments and spaces of dialogue to heal wounds and prevent conflicts, promoting a culture inspired by transitional and restorative justice. It also makes recommendations relating to civic space, including the need to recognise the value of civil society, to put in place robust mechanisms to monitor and document accountability for violations of civic space, to reinvigorate existing structures in order to ensure that citizens of the world have a greater voice in global affairs, and generally to accord greater priority to delivering on human rights, the SDGs and managing destabilisation within the UN.

VNR assessments

Several global analyses of the VNR reports are produced annually. They include the Partners for Review (P4R) Comparative Analysis of the VNRs¹⁸ (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) and the VNR Synthesis Reports published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). Most of these global analyses look at trends, best practices, challenges and progress made on the SDGs as reported by governments. They often include Goal-specific assessments, including SDG 16, and frequently assess the engagement of civil society as reported by the government. These reports are consistent in terms of methodology and therefore useful for assessing progress on the SDGs at the national level.

The **P4R Network**, for instance, has produced methodologically consistent analyses of the VNR reports for the entire first HLPF cycle 2016-2019, looking at institutional frameworks, stakeholder engagement and data and statistics. This series highlights central patterns of SDG reporting, emerging trends and good practices. In 2019 the P4R Comparative Analysis broadened its scope to embrace i) institutional mechanisms for review processes, ii) mainstreaming and policy coherence, iii) stakeholder engagement, iv) statistics and data as well as v) an assessment of second-time VNR countries. The report also includes an assessment of progress reported on SDG 16, which found that countries do recognise the overall importance of the Goal in creating peaceful and stable societies and that they undertake a broad spectrum of measures to support its implementation. However, the report identifies few strategic approaches to address the broader thematic aspects of SDG 16 and its interlinkages with other goals. The report also calls for greater clarity on Goal-specific progress on monitoring, stakeholder engagement and partnerships, as well as details on challenges, shortfalls, needs and future action to be taken.

¹⁶ <https://gcap.global/news/peoples-assembly-declaration/>

¹⁷ The Rome Declaration was adopted and presented by civil society in a [statement](#) to Member States, international organisations, and other SDG 16+ stakeholders at the Rome SDG 16+ Conference on 28 May 2016.

¹⁸ 'Partners for Review, Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis', GIZ, 2019.

One example of a global VNR assessment that takes into consideration civil society reporting is the CEPEI report on ‘Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018’.¹⁹ The report highlights the need to make progress on the establishment of key SDG building blocks, including governance structures, institutional arrangements, policies and means of implementation. Furthermore, it calls attention to the need to improve stakeholder engagement, the need for stronger engagement on the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda, and the need to scale up efforts to address the principle of LNOB.

UNDP has analysed emerging findings from the VNRs of SDG implementation in fragile and crisis settings, identifying common bottlenecks, promising practices and recommendations. Among the key findings was the importance of government leadership and strengthening institutional capacity gaps, particularly in the absence of technical capacities. The report also underscored the need for high quality, disaggregated data, and pointed to challenges in tackling LNOB, the need to sustain reliable funding for development priorities, as well as the importance of comprehensive coordination. It made five recommendations; i) address the root causes of fragility by prioritising prevention, equality and non-discrimination, ii) strengthen coordination, iii) promote institutionalised multi-stakeholder engagement in all phases of SDG localisation and implementation, iv) strengthen country systems and national capacities, and v) invest in data availability and engage civil society and the private sector to validate and collect data.²⁰

Assessments – progress on SDG 16 and SDG 16+

Increasingly, Goal-specific assessments and analyses are emerging. Civil society assessments of progress on SDG 16 implementation taken from the Civil Society Rome Declaration were published ahead of the 2019 HLPF.²¹ They were drawn up following consultations with over 100 CSOs working on SDG 16+. Building on shared principles and commitments, the assessments made a number of recommendations, including pursuing integrated approaches and interlinkages for inclusive results; mobilising and scaling up investments to accelerate implementation efforts; increasing capacity building for implementation; strengthening data, monitoring and accountability; promoting meaningful and inclusive participation and partnerships; and protecting civil society and expanding civic space.²²

The Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies is a coordinating platform for UN member states, private sector, civil society and international entities that collaborate on promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Ahead of the 2019 HLPF, its report on SDG 16+²³ called attention to three facts: i) increased political and financial investment is need to accelerate progress on SDG 16+, ii) SDG 16+ implementation requires a ‘whole of government’ and ‘whole of society’ approach, and iii) SDG 16+ is instrumental in protecting fundamental freedoms and ensuring that no one is left behind. The report provides a critical perspective of member states and partners actively involved in implementing SDG 16. It highlights the importance of partnerships and integrated solutions, and of countries and member states taking charge and leading a reshaping of the institutional and social landscape, preparing the ground for important reforms that will help build sustainable peace. The findings, which emerged from consultations in the run-up to producing the report, indicate that the number of countries reporting on SDG 16 is increasing, but that greater efforts are needed to ensure that the Goal is also included in development planning, prioritisation and budgeting.

19 ‘Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018’, CEPEI, 2019.

20 ‘Snapshot – SDGs in crisis? Emerging findings from the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of SDG Implementation in Fragile and Crisis Settings’, UNDP, 2019.

21 <https://tapnetwork2030.org/romedeclaration/>

22 Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+, 2019.

23 ‘Enabling the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda through SDG 16+’, The Global Alliance, 2019.

The Pathfinder report 'Justice for all – The Report of the Task Force on Justice'²⁴ provides a first assessment of the global justice gap and states the need to shift to a model that guarantees access to justice for all. It proposes an approach that puts justice at the centre of sustainable development. It introduces a people-centred approach to justice and puts emphasis on open and inclusive justice systems. The report stresses that in order to deliver justice for all, countries must resolve people's justice problems, prevent injustices from occurring and create opportunities for people to participate fully in their society and economies.

The SDG 16 Data Initiative produces an annual evaluation of global progress on peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Its Global Report²⁵ helps governments and civil society stakeholders understand progress on SDG 16 targets and gives them an evidence base that will enable them to identify gaps and shortcomings in the implementation and monitoring of SDG 16. **The 2019 report assesses progress on all twelve targets and sheds light on key observations. It points to the vitally important role played by civil society in supporting and complementing the work of governments with respect to collecting, monitoring, and reporting on data for SDG 16.** Data collected by civil society can fill methodological and conceptual data gaps relating to SDG 16 with the help of innovative methodologies and partnerships. Civil society can also reduce the capacity strain on NSO by forging strategic partnerships with official data collectors. As an overarching recommendation, the report proposes including non-official data sources alongside official data sources in the global and national monitoring of SDG 16 implementation. It also suggests i) expanding the number of civil society members, especially those representing local and marginalised voices, ii) adding indicators that more accurately reflect the objectives of the targets, and ii) accepting the role of civil society non-official methodologies and data, which should be integrated into the monitoring process.²⁶

The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) assessed the progress made across the African continent ahead of the 2019 HLPF. The report highlights emerging trends in monitoring SDG 16 and SDG 16+ targets and explores some key challenges to achieving the commitments on peace, justice and strong institutions. The report underscores the strong commitment to SDG 16 among African countries and notes that cost-effective data collection and analysis are carried out. There is however a need to increase efforts to mainstream SDG 16, and the report calls for including civil society in a meaningful way to help monitor SDG 16.

Further resources include annual analyses of VNR reports by White & Case LLP²⁷. The report analyses VNRs to determine (i) whether the countries reported on the SDG 16+ Targets; (ii) the extent of the reporting on such targets; (iii) whether the report indicated that it was a product of an inclusive, participatory process; (iv) whether the report noted that the private sector was involved in implementation or reporting, and (v) whether sources of data were provided. In addition, for member states that submitted a VNR for a second time, White & Case compared the member states' SDG16+ reporting in 2019 to its prior submission.

24 'Justice for all – The Report of the Task Force on Justice', Pathfinders, 2019.

25 'SDG 16 Data Initiative 2019 Global Report', Members of the Data Initiative, 2019.

26 'SDG 16 Data Initiative 2019 Global Report', Members of the Data Initiative, 2019, p. 4.

27 The White & Case VNR Reviews from 2016-2019 are available publicly at:
<https://www.sdg16hub.org/content/global-alliance-white-case-review-2019-voluntary-national-reports-vnrs-summary-report>

2.0 Key features – reporting on SDG 16

When comparing reporting on SDG 16 in the selected VNR and Spotlight Reports, the many diverse, even partly overlapping, interpretations of SDG 16 and references to relevant sectoral policy areas become evident. This may be understood as a confirmation of the importance of SDG 16 as enabler in VNRs. Altogether, the analysis shows that reporting on SDG 16 varies significantly. A number of the Spotlight Reports focus specifically on SDG 16 (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, UK), and, apart from **Pakistan's** Spotlight Report, all reports include a chapter on SDG 16 and report in great detail on the Goal.

With the exception of **Cambodia's** and **Pakistan's** VNR reports, all VNR reports included here, contain a specific chapter on SDG 16. **Many countries refer to the overall importance of SDG 16 as an enabler of peaceful and fair societies** (Cameroon, Cambodia, Ghana, Pakistan, UK), with specific reference to human rights (Ghana, Mongolia, Serbia, UK) and the rule of law (Mauritania). Other VNR reports refer to the overall importance of strong institutions to enable countries to respond to multiple development challenges, without specifically highlighting SDG 16 (Guatemala).

Serbia's VNR does not outline how SDG 16 is addressed, but considers the Goal from the perspectives of i) youth, ii) human and minority rights, and iii) local government. It specifically voices concern about data availability and makes a number of recommendations.²⁸ While **Cambodia's** VNR report does not specifically review Goal 16, it adds Goal 18 as an additional national SDG. The Goal requires the clearance of land mines and explosive remnants of war, reflecting Cambodia's priority of demining territory as expressed in target 16.1.²⁹ **Pakistan's** VNR report does not contain a chapter dedicated to Goal 16, but does offer some details, such as the fact that most legislation concerning SDG 16 has been adopted. The report has a strong focus on efforts at the local level, including consultative sessions on SDG 16 in Punjab.³⁰ The **United Kingdom's** VNR report focuses on crime-related aspects of a number of SDGs as well as the principle of LNOB. It raises emerging issues such as waste crime and online crime, including hate crime and sexual cybercrime.³¹

Most of the spotlight reports similarly highlight the overall importance of SDG 16 as an enabler of peaceful and fair societies and many place strong emphasis on human rights (Cambodia, Ghana, Mauritania, Pakistan, Serbia, UK). Further reference is made to SDG localisation and decentralisation (Cambodia, Pakistan), and to the lack of access to justice and public institutions (Ghana). **Mauritania's** spotlight report features a long list of priorities, including commitment to good governance, the fight against corruption, the strengthening of democracy and decentralisation, the promotion of the rule of law, the strengthening of parliamentary scrutiny, the reform of the legal and judicial system, the revitalisation of public administration, the promotion of economic and social activities, and human rights. **Serbia's** two spotlight reports

28 'Shadow Report on progress towards implementation of Sustainable Development Goals', Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit & SRH Serbia, 2019, pp. 94–201.

29 'Cambodia's Voluntary National Review 2019 of the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Kingdom of Cambodia, 2019, p. 5.

30 Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – Voluntary National Review, Government of Pakistan, 2019, p. 60.

31 Voluntary National Review of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals', United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2019, p. 197.

attach particular importance to the relevance of SDG 16 with a view to gender equality and violence against women and girls, of which one features elaborate feedback on SDG 16 in the area of marginalized groups and sexual and reproductive rights (target 16.1). Other reports include a list of legislative measures that are of relevance to SDG 16 (Guatemala).

A number of spotlight reports (Cameroon, Ghana, Guatemala, Pakistan, UK) and some VNR reports (Cameroon, Mauritania, UK) make reference to fragility. For instance, the UK's VNR report focuses on the fact that tackling causes of conflict and tackling insecurity and instability is central to the work on SDG 16. It indicates that 57% of the UK's development cooperation budget is spent on fragile states affected by conflict.

A few spotlight reports underscore the importance of SDG 16+ (Cameroon, Ghana). **Cameroon's** spotlight report considers the broader SDG 16+ targets and identifies overall integrated actions needed to further progress and drive implementation of the concept. The study also takes a critical look at three levels of progress and implementation. At the strategic level, it considers how Cameroon prioritises SDG 16+ Goals and how this is translated into policies. At the operational level, it looks at the translation of SDG 16+ into practice and Cameroon's progress towards a more peaceful, just and inclusive society. Finally, it spotlights the partnerships level and in particular how civil society has been involved in SDG implementation and in the official review process.

2.1 Reporting on progress on SDG 16

Many of the spotlight reports focus specifically on SDG 16 and provide an overview of progress made on realising the Goal (Cambodia, Cameroon, Guatemala, Mongolia, Serbia, UK). The **United Kingdom's** spotlight report, for instance, includes a performance rating that indicates progress made for each target (See Box 6). **When looking at reporting at the target level, Spotlight Reports report in more detail compared to the VNR reports. Most of the Spotlight Reports also include feedback on specific targets** (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mauretania, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia, UK). In many cases selected targets are analyzed and detailed feedback is provided. The feedback on the targets provided in the VNR reports relates mainly to data availability (Cambodia, Ghana, Guatemala, Mauretania, Mongolia, Pakistan). For instance, Cambodia's VNR indicates progress on selected targets (see Box 7).

Box 6: UK Spotlight Report, Performance Rating SDG 16 ³²

Sustainable Development Goal Target	Rating
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	●
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children	●
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	●
16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime	●
16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	●
16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	●
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	●
16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance	●
16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration	●
16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national and international agreements	●
16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime	●
16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development	●

Box 7: Progress on SDG 16, Cambodia's VNR report ³³

	Targets & Indicators	CSDG target			Actual			Progress
		2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	
16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all							No data
16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels							On track
16.7.1	Proportion of female government official in ministries/agencies	40	41	42	40	40	41	On track
16.9	By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration							No data

³² UKSSD – Measuring UP, 'Part 1: Sustainable Development Goal 16.

³³ 'Cambodia's Voluntary National Review 2019 of the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Kingdom of Cambodia, 2019, p. 32.

2.2 Self-assessments

Assessments of progress made on SDG 16 implementation, and feedback provided, feature prominently in the spotlight reports (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mauritania, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia, UK). **Some reports voice concern about the lack of progress made on SDG 16** (Cameroon, Guatemala, Serbia), or in one case on SDG 16+ (Cameroon). The reports focus to differing degrees on peaceful, just and inclusive societies, good governance, anticorruption and access to justice. The two spotlight reports from **Ghana** indicate that sufficient legal and policy frameworks are in place for the effective implementation of the SDGs, particularly for those that relate to the peace goals in the context of SDG 16+. According to one report, research indicates that Ghana has put in place most of the infrastructure required for SDG 16+ implementation, including policies, systems and plans. The other report includes a list of positive results achieved thus far and states that existing plans for measuring results are far too limited and that currently only 8 % of Ghana's citizens consider that they enjoy a high level of accessibility to justice and public institutions.³⁴ Pakistan's spotlight report refers to a questionnaire which revealed that 13 % of respondents were happy with initiatives taken on peace, justice and strong institutions.

Compared to the spotlight reports, the VNR reports provide less information on progress related to SDG 16 (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mongolia, Pakistan). **Mongolia's** VNR indicates that progress on SDG implementation has been slow, and refers to the Global Peace Index. Further assessments relate to corruption (Cambodia, Mongolia), access to justice (Mauritania, Pakistan) and good governance (Mongolia, Pakistan). As also indicated by the P4R Comparative Analysis of the 2019 VNR reports, reporting on the broader linkages of SDG 16 with other SDGs and the Agenda as a whole is limited.

2.3 Key challenges related to SDG 16 implementation

Reporting on the challenges involved in the implementation of SDG 16 covers a wide spectrum. The spotlight reports in particular identify many challenges in terms of access to information (Pakistan), restrictions on NGO engagement in public policy (Ghana, Guatemala), a general lack of involvement of civil society (Serbia), ineffectiveness of laws (Ghana), lack of policies (Serbia), capacity aspects (Cambodia, Ghana, Mauritania, Somaliland), lack of data (Cambodia), data collection issues (Mauritania, Serbia), localisation efforts (Cameroon, Cambodia, Ghana), national and inter-institutional coordination (Cambodia, Ghana, Serbia), discrimination, inclusivity and exclusion of groups (Cameroon, Ghana), including women and girls (Cameroon, Pakistan, Serbia), and human rights violations (Pakistan). Other issues raised included implementation (Cameroon), ongoing violent conflict (Cameroon), lack of awareness of the SDGs (Cameroon, Ghana, Pakistan), access to justice (Ghana), general inefficiency issues (Ghana, Mauritania), accountability issues (Ghana), weak institutions (Ghana, Mauritania), culture of corruption and lack of reporting (Ghana), and regressive laws (Guatemala). The **United Kingdom's** spotlight report highlights Brexit as a key challenge to the implementation of SDG 16. It states that the government cannot afford to be complacent about backsliding that threatens the implementation of SDG 16, as a result of the country's withdrawal from the European Union. This concern is raised along with other contemporary challenges such as disruptive technologies, populism, terrorism, high-level corruption, social media, the impact of austerity, and the removal of legal aid.³⁵

Challenges are reported in less detail in the VNR reports, although a number of countries do mention specific complexities related to SDG 16 (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mongolia, Serbia, UK). Challenges raised in the VNRs include fighting corruption (Cambodia), lack of capacities and resources to effectively implement measures planned (Cambodia, Ghana, Mauritania), effectiveness of judicial proce-

34 Progress on the SDGs: Telling the Ghanaian Story through the Lens of Citizens – Civil Society Organisations' Shadow Report on the Voluntary National Review. Ghana Civil Society Organisations Platform on the Sustainable Development Goals, 2019, p. 51.

35 'Measuring up, Part 1: Sustainable Development Goal 16, Peace, justice and strong institutions', UKSSD, Involve, 2019, p. 2.

dures (Mauritania), decentralisation (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana), confidence in national institutions (Cameroon, Mongolia), and population registration and data (Mauritania). Guaranteeing human rights is also mentioned (Mongolia), as are accountability and anti-corruption measures (Serbia). The **United Kingdom**'s VNR identifies a number of challenges such as reducing all forms of violence, illicit financial flows, underreporting and discrimination, especially with a view to the principle of leaving no one behind.

2.4 Reflections

When assessing the key features of reporting on SDG 16, a broad range of aspects are covered by both the spotlight reports and the VNR reports. While commitment to the overall Goal and its role as an enabler is recognised, spotlight reports offer more details on specific progress, assessments and challenges.

Reporting reflects the broad scope of SDG 16. Although both VNR and spotlight reports cover a wide range of aspects, reporting on strategic progress of the goal and its broader impact is limited. Some good practices are identified in spotlight reports, including performance rating of progress achieved on the SDG 16 targets (UK) and broader considerations of SDG 16+, with a study of SDG 16+ that evaluated civil society's involvement in SDG implementation and the review process (Cameroon).

A comparison of the content matter and topics covered by the government and civil society reports for each country indicates that although there is some overlap, the reports differ significantly and do not address the same issues.

A number of spotlight reports focus specifically on SDG 16, and in some cases address single targets. These reports offer specialised and rich content that can be relevant for VNR reporting and point the way forward for the further implementation of Goal 16.

Reporting in the VNR reports, and even more so in the spotlight reports, on the many challenges indicates that strategic approaches will have to be scaled up in order to achieve genuine progress on SDG 16. Civil society in particular voices concern and points to the need for progress. The need to step up efforts on SDG 16 is fully in line with the findings and recommendations made in the global VNR analyses and SDG/SDG 16 assessment reports.³⁶

36 Chapter 1.5.

3.0 Mainstreaming SDG 16

The transversal nature of SDG 16 and its targets brings with it both opportunities and challenges when it comes to mainstreaming the Goal at the national and local level. While adapting institutional frameworks and introducing legislative measures, policies and strategies that integrate SDG 16, its inter-linkages with other goals and with the Agenda as a whole are crucially important to the achievement of sustainable development. When reporting on SDG 16, spotlight reports and VNR reports alike highlight a number of efforts that help mainstream SDG 16. Of these, institutional changes, legal measures, policies and reform efforts are cited in both VNR and spotlight reports.

3.1 Institutional changes

In terms of institutional changes, VNR reports present various examples of specific entities, agencies or units established that are relevant for the implementation of Goal 16 (Cameroon, Ghana, Guatemala, Mongolia). Examples include a domestic violence and victims support unit (Ghana), platforms that enhance cross-sectoral coordination (Guatemala), institutional structures mandated to strengthen transparency and human rights (Guatemala), and the establishment of a child and youth agency at national and local level (Mongolia).

With a view to addressing institutional limitations, **Mongolia's** VNR report identifies a need to amend legislation and reform existing structures and functions of government. One suggestion is to establish a government authority that would be responsible for policy coherence and coordination.³⁷ **Guatemala's** VNR report points to the implementation of new government auditing standards and a national programme aimed at certifying knowledge in public administration.³⁸

While the spotlight reports offer less information on new institutional measures, some feedback includes institutional structures that address corruption, crime and justice (Cambodia, Pakistan), public financial audit institutions (Mauritania), as well as reforms designed to improve the quality of public services (Mauritania).

3.2 Mainstreaming SDG 16 into National Development Plans

Mainstreaming the SDGs into National Development Plans (NDPs) is increasingly seen as a way of enhancing coherence. This reflects a trend towards a new generation of development plans. Assessment of global VNR reporting³⁹ in 2019 indicates that approximately 30 % of reporting countries⁴⁰ stated that the SDGs were incorporated in their NDPs, while other countries envisage integrating the SDGs in the next plan.

37 Mongolia Voluntary National Review Report 2019, Government of Mongolia, 2019, p. 67.

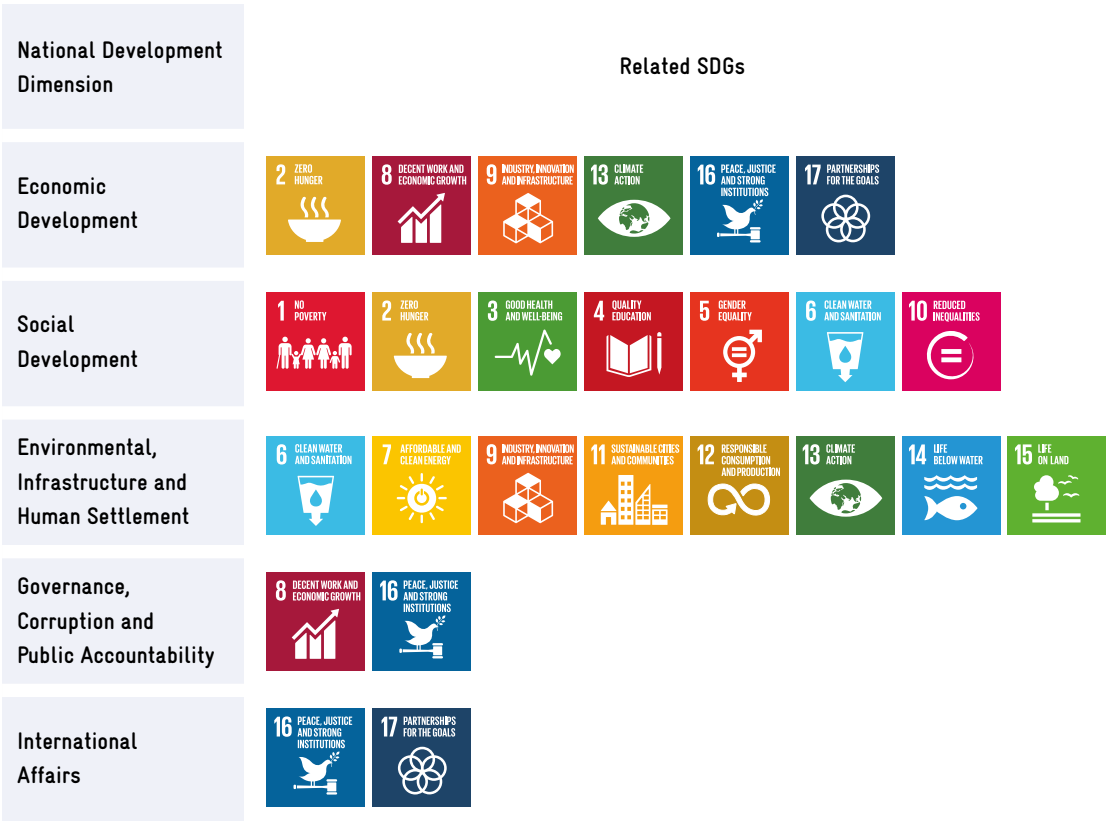
38 'Revisión Nacional Voluntaria 2019. El camino hacia el desarrollo sostenible', Guatemala, 2019, p. 292.

39 Partners for Review, Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis, GIZ, 2019, p. 23.

40 Algeria, Central African Republic, Chad, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, Mauritius, the Philippines, Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, Vanuatu

From an SDG 16 perspective, the comparative analysis of VNR and spotlight reports reveals a variety of approaches to mainstreaming SDG 16 into NDPs. In general, the VNR reports provide more specific details on integrating SDG 16 into national planning processes (Cambodia, Ghana, Guatemala, Mauritania, Pakistan) and the national vision (Cameroon, Mongolia). Cameroon’s vision for 2035, for instance, aims to build a peaceful and inclusive society based on respect for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance in all sectors of the economy.⁴¹ One of Ghana’s spotlight reports and the country’s VNR report also explain how SDG 16 is integrated into the National SDG Implementation Framework (See Box 8). Both also underscore the importance of the country’s decentralised planning system, which assigns planning responsibilities to both national and local level. In the case of Serbia, one spotlight report indicates that no national plan has been drawn up for the implementation of SDGs. The report also expresses concern over the overall implementation status, speaking of a ‘black hole’, in particular when it comes to allocation of budgets and creation of financed plans for implementation of strategic national and local level programmes. This applies, for instance, to human rights, especially when it comes to sexual and reproductive rights.⁴²

Box 8: Mapping of Ghana’s national development agenda per SDG⁴³



41 'Forum Politique de Haut Niveau Objectifs de Développement Durable ODD – Examen National Volontaire ODD Cameroun', République du Cameroun, 2019, p. 66.
 42 Shadow Report on progress towards implementation of Sustainable Development Goals', Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit & SRH Serbia, 2019, p. 6.
 43 'Ghana: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Republic of Ghana, 2019, p. 9.

3.3 Sector strategies, plans, policies and legislation

The reports outline various specific plans, policies and legislative measures that support the implementation of SDG 16. In most cases these are introduced as standalone measures that address specific aspects of the Goal. Both the spotlight and the VNR reports lay out measures that support SDG 16, although this is more the case in the VNR reports. The VNR reports analysed reported on various aspects relevant to SDG 16, including measures that help enhance access to information (Cambodia, Ghana), and anti-corruption initiatives (Ghana, Guatemala). Further examples include policies addressing access to justice (Mauritania), as well as strategic efforts to address organised crime strategies, counter terrorism, and address trafficking and exploitation (UK). The **United Kingdom**'s report maps how the draft Programme for Government aligns with the Goals, including SDG 16, in Northern Ireland and lists programmes. **Serbia**'s VNR report presents many strategies, including gender equality, youth, persons with disabilities, and corruption in local government, although it makes few specific references to SDG 16. Some VNR reports provide a long list of legislative measures (Cameroon, Ghana, Pakistan). **Cameroon** highlights a number of laws with reference to target 16.3, but the report provides few details. **Cambodia**'s VNR report highlights the fight against corruption, public administration reform, reform of the armed forces, public financial management reform, as well as a decentralisation reform. It also reports that a reform to the legal and judicial systems is ongoing, including measures on capacity building, ensuring independence and impartiality of courts, strengthening the rule of law, ensuring segregation of powers and respect of individual rights, as well as guaranteeing justice for the general population.⁴⁴

Both the VNR and the spotlight reports include measures that address human rights and gender equality. In the area of gender mainstreaming, for instance, spotlight reports present several initiatives, including national gender policies and programmes (Cameroon, Ghana, Mongolia, Serbia). A number of VNR reports cover specific measures that address human rights (Cambodia, Mauritania, Mongolia, Serbia, UK). These include institutional structures addressing gender and human rights (Mauritania), national action plans (UK), details on the penal code, dedication to minority rights (Serbia), juvenile justice law and legislation designed to help realise human rights and fundamental freedoms (Cambodia). A number of measures related to the rights of children also feature in reports (Mongolia, UK). **Mongolia**'s VNR and spotlight report both highlight the rights of children.

Many ad hoc examples of how countries address the LNOB principle can be found in the VNR reports, although they offer few concrete examples that directly relate to SDG 16. Examples include social protection measures (Cambodia), empowerment of groups (Cambodia, Mauritania, Serbia), age discrimination (Cambodia) and tackling hate crime (UK). **Mauritania**'s VNR report indicates that the country's sustainable development strategy covers access to justice for vulnerable individuals and the preservation of the rights of defendants in establishing the rule of law.⁴⁵ In more general terms, the **United Kingdom** underscores the importance of civil society and democracy in the context of LNOB.

A number of the spotlight reports feature initiatives that focus on youth (Cameroon, Ghana, Mongolia, Serbia). **Serbia**'s spotlight report makes a number of recommendations referring specifically to youth for a number of SDGs, including SDG 16.⁴⁶ Concerns relating to data availability in the context of LNOB are underscored in **Mongolia**'s spotlight report, which recommends that the country's government address the problem of the lack of data available to measure progress on leaving no one behind, as well as strengthening participatory governance.⁴⁷

44 Cambodia's Voluntary National Review 2019 of the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda', Kingdom of Cambodia, 2019, p. 40.

45 'Revue Nationale Volontaire', République Islamique de Mauritanie, 2019, p. 19.

46 Shadow Report on progress towards implementation of Sustainable Development Goals', Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit & SRH Serbia, 2019, p. 98.

47 'Mongolian Civil Society Joint Report on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals', Mongolian National CSOs Network on SDGs, 2019, p. 10.

3.4 Inter-linkages and SDG 16+

While measures that support the mainstreaming of SDG 16 itself are important, the Goal's contribution to, and linkages with other SDGs are vital. **In comparison to the VNR reports, spotlight reports devote more attention to the transformative effects of SDG 16 with respect to other SDGs and to the Agenda as a whole.** Some reports point to the crucial links to other SDGs without going into any more detail (Cameroon, Pakistan, Serbia), whereas a few spotlight reports provide more detail (Cameroon, Ghana, Guatemala). One of Ghana's spotlight reports points to an inherent link between SDG 16 and SDG 3 Shadow Report on progress towards implementation of Sustainable Development Goals', Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit & SRH Serbia, 2019, p. 98. (good health and well-being), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), while highlighting the fact that SDG 16 can act as an enabler. The lack of access to justice and public institutions is also singled out in Ghana's second spotlight report as one reason for the reduced ability to reap the benefits of sustainable development. Guatemala's spotlight report highlights SDG 16's inter-linkages with SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 4 (quality education).

SDG 16+ is addressed in a few spotlight reports (Cameroon, Ghana). Cameroon's report, for instance, reports on several measures put in place with a view to achieving SDG 16+. These relate to inclusive governance, development, peace and security, human rights, women, children and the rights of youth and persons with disabilities. While highlighting these issues, the spotlight report points out the challenges involved in implementing the measures and states that little progress has been made in implementing and achieving SDG 16+. Ghana's spotlight reports highlight the need to strengthen awareness raising efforts on SDG 16+ at all levels.⁴⁸ The two spotlight reports consider the legal and policy frameworks in place to be sufficient for the effective implementation of the SDGs, particularly those that relate to the SDG 16+ peace targets. They state that research findings indicate that Ghana has put in place most of the infrastructure it needs to implement SDG 16+, including policies, systems and plans.

With the exception of the United Kingdom's VNR report, which does mention inter-linkages in goal-focused chapters, generally less reference is made to the SDG 16 inter-linkages and to SDG 16+ in the VNR reports. Countries do, however, recognise the importance of addressing the inter-linkages (Guatemala, Pakistan, Ghana). Guatemala, for instance, underscores the effects of sectoral transversal policies at federal and sub-national level, and states that the judiciary is most concerned with institutional strengthening, security and justice in its contribution to the national priorities, while recognising that its work will have cross-cutting effects in all countries in the region. Ghana's VNR report makes reference to good governance and human rights, and mentions that SDG 16 has been linked to various aspects of national development including economic development, governance, corruption and public accountability and international affairs.⁴⁹ Pakistan's VNR report deems the lack of awareness and knowledge on policy coherence and the inter-linkages to be a major obstacle.

48 Country Report, Progress towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies – SDG 16+ in Ghana', WANEP and GPPAC, 2019, p. 22.

49 Ghana: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Republic of Ghana, 2019, p. 9.

3.5 SDG Localisation

In the context of localising the SDGs, some spotlight reports indicate that different levels of government were involved in producing the report (Cambodia, Ghana, Pakistan). **Ghana**'s spotlight reports, for instance, indicate that SDG 16 is translated to both national and local level, while traditional authorities are focusing their efforts on a more local scale.⁵⁰ Other spotlight reports give examples of initiatives that localise SDG 16 (Pakistan), reforms to strengthen localisation (Cambodia, Cameroon, Mauritania) and legislation (Cameroon). **Cameroon**'s spotlight report stipulates that decentralisation is to drive the promotion of development, democracy and good governance at local level. **Serbia**'s spotlight report also refers to the establishment of local structures, and reports on the production of a manual entitled 'Agenda 2030 in my municipality – A Handbook for Practitioners for Localizing the SDGs'.

Localisation also features in a number of VNR reports (Cameroon, Guatemala, Mongolia, Mauritania, Pakistan). **Cameroon**'s VNR report, for instance, highlights an interim national strategy and the integration of the SDGs into local plans as a part of the National Participatory Development Program.⁵¹ **Pakistan** mentions that all tiers of government are actively participating in SDG implementation, with the Provincial Technical Committee to guide the mainstreaming of the SDGs and six Core Groups working on thematic efforts, including one on localisation. The policy focus of one province is governance, justice, transparency and empowering women.⁵² **Mongolia**'s VNR report concludes that a weak regulatory framework and process in relation to the SDGs is partly responsible for inconsistencies between long-term, medium-term, and sectoral and local development policies, and highlights the need to amend the country's Law on Development Policy and Planning.⁵³

50 'Country Report, Progress towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies – SDG 16+ in Ghana', WANEP and GPPAC, 2019, p. 11.

51 'Forum Politique de Haut Niveau Objectifs de Développement Durable ODD – Examen National Volontaire ODD Cameroun', République du Cameroun, 2019, p. 1.

52 'Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Government of Pakistan, 2019, p. 57.

53 'Mongolia Voluntary National Review Report 2019', Government of Mongolia, 2019, p. 12.

3.6 Reflections

Institutional changes, legal measures, policies and reform efforts can be found in both the VNR reports and the spotlight reports. Compared to the spotlight reports, however, the selected VNR reports provide more information on specific initiatives that support the mainstreaming of SDG 16. While measures to mainstream SDG 16 itself are considered important, the Goal's contribution to, and linkages with other SDGs is essential. However, these are rarely mentioned in the latter. In comparison to the VNR reports, the spotlight reports devote more attention to the transformative effects of SDG 16 with respect to other SDGs and to the Agenda as a whole, including the relevance of the concept of SDG 16+. This confirms the findings and recommendations of a number of global assessment reports, including the Global Alliance's report on SDG 16+, which calls for political and financial investment to accelerate progress on achieving SDG 16+.

In response to demands for coherent mainstreaming of the SDGs, some VNR reports look at efforts to integrate SDG 16 into NDPs or their national vision. **Although mention is made of strategies for individual areas such as human rights or gender, few specific strategies are reported that address the broader impact of SDG 16, including the principle of leaving no one behind.**

The need to localise the SDGs is recognised in both reporting processes. **While good localisation practices are reported, with respect to decentralisation and mainstreaming the SDGs in local plans, the reports provide limited examples of measures specifically designed to localise SDG 16.** Local stakeholders were involved in some of the review processes, especially for the spotlight reports. Involving local CSOs is key to ensuring that the SDGs are truly people-centred and to facilitating bottom-up approaches to achieving sustainable development.

Generally, reports on mainstreaming SDG 16 make reference to policies and legislative measures adopted. While these all contribute in part to achieving SDG 16, little feedback is provided on overall strategic approaches, including the interlinkages and/or trade-offs of Goal 16 with other SDGs. While more detailed feedback on the broader connections of SDG 16 as well as SDG 16+ can be found in the spotlight reports, overall this assessment confirms the findings of multiple global SDG assessment reports that more analysis, investment and action is needed to accelerate the implementation of Goal 16 and the agenda as a whole.

4.0 Stakeholder engagement

While governments have a leading role to play, the achievement of SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole depends strongly on a ‘whole of society’ approach that involves stakeholders from across and at all levels of society. Stakeholders can make important contributions to peace building, inclusion, advancing the rule of law and elimination of corruption.

In their VNR reports, countries recognise the importance of stakeholder inclusion, particularly in the form of consultation processes. Some countries are developing CSO structures and platforms that aim to strengthen or improve the coordination of stakeholder engagement. Few reports, however, describe in detail mechanisms to engage stakeholders.⁵⁴

Reporting on stakeholder engagement in the spotlight reports suggests it is difficult to gauge the extent to which a ‘whole of society’ approach is actually adopted. Some spotlight reports mention specific stakeholder groups (Cameroon, Ghana, Mauritania, Mongolia), but give no detailed descriptions of these groups or of their involvement. In one case (Serbia), the spotlight report questions the extent to which the government’s institutional SDG arrangements actually include non-government stakeholders. In this case, the report states that, although the plan was for inter-ministerial working groups to include civil society, academia and the private sector, it is unclear whether this has actually been implemented. It also indicates that there is no cross-sectoral participatory approach to the SDG implementation and monitoring process. Other spotlight reports identify productive cooperation between government and civil society (Ghana), referring to a CSO platform and highlighting the importance of SDG 16+ in this context. This platform is also reported in Ghana’s VNR (See Box 9).

Box 9: Ghana’s CSO Platform on SDGs

Both Ghana’s VNR and its spotlight reports make mention of the country’s CSO Platform on SDGs. The VNR describes how the Platform on the SDGs was set up to ensure coordination and partnerships on SDGs within the CSO space. The platform has a membership of more than 300 local and international CSOs, making up 17 sub-platforms, which are aligned with each of the SDGs, including SDG 16. The platform serves as the focal point for engagement between CSOs, the private sector and government on the SDGs. It is part of Ghana’s SDG institutional architecture. Ghana’s spotlight reports cite the Platform as an example of good practice in the context of productive cooperation between the government and CSOs, especially with a view to SDG 16+.

⁵⁴ Partners for Review, Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis’, GIZ, 2019, p. 7.

Most VNR reports highlight the importance of, and express commitment to engaging key stakeholders including civil society, academia and the private sector (Cameroon, Ghana, Mauritania, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia, UK). In some cases, stakeholder engagement is reported in relation to the review and reporting process itself (Cameroon, Mauritania, Mongolia). **Cameroon's** VNR, for instance, stresses that a participatory and inclusive approach was taken to preparing the report, with consultation processes in use. **Mongolia** states in its VNR report that it has devised a platform to deepen awareness of the SDGs among stakeholders.

Some spotlight reports make reference to the engagement of non-government stakeholders in the VNR process (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mongolia, Pakistan, UK). **Mongolia's** spotlight report points to an independent assessment carried out by NGOs of the practical implementation of rights to information. The assessment indicated a need for progress on SDG indicator 16.10.2 (Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/ or policy guarantees for public access to information).⁵⁵

Serbia's spotlight report underscores a lack of scope for civil society to participate meaningfully. Feedback from youth organisations relating to a number of SDGs, including SDG 16, is included in an annex in Serbia's VNR report. The annex presents feedback from a number of organisations that are involved in Serbia's implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It also includes a matrix indicating the relevance of each SDG for each civil society organisation which can be used for awareness raising activities (Box 10).

Box 10: Stakeholder mechanisms

Outcomes of civil society consultations carried out by the TAP Network and assessments of VNR reports lead us to conclude that the level of awareness of the SDGs in general and SDG 16 in particular remains low. As this impacts adversely on stakeholder engagement, meaningful stakeholder engagement is critical. Useful tools and guidance are available:

- ▶ **SDG Accountability Handbook**, the TAP Network. This handbook is a capacity development source designed to help national-level civil society drive government accountability for the SDGs, and guide them through the practical steps to improved accountability for the 2030 Agenda in their country. It features a chapter on raising awareness of SDG 16 through public outreach campaigns, including information of the importance of such efforts and recommended approaches and methodologies that can be utilized by civil society and other stakeholders.
- ▶ **The Advocacy Toolkit: Influencing the Post-2015 Development Agenda**, CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum. This toolkit provides detailed guidance on how to prepare for, implement and manage an awareness-raising and/or advocacy campaign.
- ▶ **SDGs in Your Municipality: 50 Practical Awareness Raising Examples**, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG). This resource offers practical examples to introduce the SDGs to a wider audience.

⁵⁵ 'Mongolian Civil Society Joint Report on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals', Mongolian National CSOs Network on SDGs, 2019, p. 43.

4.1 Inclusive decision-making

Little feedback is given on inclusive decision-making, which is referred to in only a few spotlight reports (Cambodia, Guatemala, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia). **Guatemala's** spotlight report voices concern about inclusive decision-making, whereas **Cambodia's** spotlight report expresses civil society's appreciation of being included in localisation moves.

While many VNR reports make mention of commitment to inclusive decision-making, few specific examples are given. Ghana refers to a participatory process used in the scope of the country's medium-term national development policy framework (2018-2021). Some countries express the need for greater participation (Mongolia, Pakistan, UK). To illustrate this, **Mongolia** spotlights limited opportunities for civil society to make its voice heard in the context of leaving no one behind.⁵⁶ The **UK** also calls for greater participation on the part of disadvantaged individuals.⁵⁷

4.2 Stakeholder engagement regarding SDG 16

While many of the examples of stakeholder engagement concern the overall VNR process and SDG implementation efforts, there is little reporting on stakeholder engagement specifically in the context of SDG 16. Some examples are given, one being **Ghana's** CSO Platform, which includes a sub-committee on SDG 16 (Box 9). In its VNR report, **Pakistan** also reports that CSOs and NGOs in Punjab have published policy briefs and carried out consultative sessions specifically on SDG 16.⁵⁸ **Serbia** points to the establishment of a platform consisting of 18 CSOs to monitor and implement human-rights-related commitments. The platform aims to contribute to better understanding and delivering the commitments Serbia has made by ratifying UN conventions.⁵⁹ The VNR report also includes a number of recommendations by youth groups for the further implementation of SDG 16.⁶⁰

56 'Mongolia Voluntary National Review Report 2019', Government of Mongolia, 2019, p. 48.

57 'Voluntary National Review of Progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals', United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2019, p. 27.

58 'Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Government of Pakistan, 2019, p. 60.

59 'Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Republic of Serbia, 2019, p. 71.

60 'Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Republic of Serbia, 2019, p. 98.

Box 11: Civil Society Organizations and the SDGs ⁶¹

Civil Society Organizations	The specific SDG to which the Civil Society Organization is dedicated																	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Entire 2030 Agenda advocacy
Belgrade Food Bank	✓	✓										✓						
Centre for European Policies																✓		
Red Cross of Serbia	✓	✓	✓															
Etno Forum Svrljig																		✓
Humanitarian Centre for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT)	✓		✓		✓											✓		
Institute for Creative entrepreneurship and Innovation	✓			✓		✓										✓	✓	
The Umbrella youth organization of Serbia																		✓
TakTik Development Center																		✓
Belgrade Center for Human Rights				✓	✓					✓						✓		
Center for Peace and Tolerance – RAS Sjenica																		✓
Association for helping mentally underdeveloped people – Aleksinac																		✓
The Center for Democracy Foundation	✓				✓			✓		✓						✓		
Center for Social Policy	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓								
Pestalozzi Children Foundation				✓														
Smart Collective												✓						
Women's club Belo Blato					✓													
Textbook publisher association				✓														
United Nations Association of Serbia (UZUNS)	✓		✓	✓	✓							✓	✓			✓	✓	
Association for Support of Persons with Disabilities "Our House"	✓								✓			✓						
Praxis																		✓
Serbian Association for Demolition, Decontamination and Recycling																		✓

Annotation: the first column contains the full name of the organization, columns marked with 1 to 17 represent the specific SDG the organization are dedicated to, 2030 represents advocacy of the Agenda 2030, and not a specific SDG – in the next period, it will be actively followed and reported in detail.

61 'Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Republic of Serbia, 2019, p. 100.

4.3 Reflections

In view of the 2030 Agenda's fundamental principles on inclusivity, participation and partnership, and its pledge to leave no one behind, governments and CSOs should aim to ensure the consistent involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement should be an ongoing process that ensures meaningful participation. Processes and mechanisms that ensure the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders can help ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement.⁶²

VNR reports recognise the importance of stakeholder engagement and of ensuring a 'whole of society' approach as being key to SDG implementation. **While good examples of stakeholder engagement initiatives can be found in both VNR and spotlight reports, critical assessments are also made and the need to strengthen stakeholder engagement is underlined.** A few spotlight reports indicate the limited scope for participation, also in the context of inclusive decision-making. Generally, few details are provided on the type of processes, descriptions of stakeholder groups or stakeholder selection processes, and limited information is offered on stakeholder engagement specifically in the context of SDG 16. In order to broaden and strengthen stakeholder engagement, greater efforts are needed to identify options for engaging stakeholders at local level too (conduct stakeholder mapping, analysis, create stakeholder engagement platforms and develop stakeholder engagement plans). This is particularly true with respect to SDG 16, a cross-cutting goal that is relevant for many civil society organisations and which calls for effective coordination.

While both VNR and spotlight reports point to the engagement of stakeholders in the review process itself, only a few VNR reports actually present feedback from stakeholders. As spotlight reports include valuable feedback that can complement the outcomes of consultation processes, the option of integrating these reports should be considered. As spotlight reports are frequently produced by a coalition of stakeholders, each with specific expertise or representing the interests of specific groups and citizens, they can provide a useful entry point for governments interested in stepping up stakeholder engagement and facilitating direct citizen engagement.

A lack of awareness of the SDGs in general and SDG 16 in particular impacts adversely on stakeholder engagement. Increasing awareness of SDG 16, for instance with the help of tools that support advocacy as well as meaningful stakeholder engagement, can help enhance the inclusive and participatory monitoring and implementation of the SDGs (Box 11).

62 'SDG Accountability Handbook', TAP Network, 2018, pp. 9-10.

5.0 Statistics and data

Measuring progress on SDG 16 is a challenging endeavor. The ubiquitous qualitative and quantitative challenges to statistical reporting for evidence-based policy making in the context of the 2030 Agenda apply in particular to SDG 16 due to the comparatively high proportion of indicators without data, coverage across time and space as well as lacking disaggregation. **For many of the indicators to measure progress across the 2030 Agenda, considerable data gaps exist on global level⁶³, and the development of adequate national indicators is slow. These global issues are being reflected in latest review processes.**

VNR reporting in 2019 included a variety of feedback on SDG related statistics and data, ranging from reporting on efforts, state of play, next steps and challenges. For most countries this is a work in progress as they continue to strengthen statistical systems as well as monitoring and data collection efforts.⁶⁴ According to the VNR reports, SDG 16 data still face many caveats due to insufficient methodologies, lacking funding or weak capacities of national statistical offices, or insufficient disaggregation of data, particularly in fragile states. In the context of the 2019 HLPF, this has led to calls to complement government and multilateral sources with non-official contribution, as a response to persistent conceptual and methodological gaps.

5.1 Reporting on data and statistics on SDG 16

Most of the spotlight reports reviewed provide some information on statistical and data-related developments with respect to SDG 16 (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mauritania, Mongolia, Serbia). In some cases, information is provided on specific targets of the Goal (Ghana, Cambodia, UK), but most present general trends rather than hard data. Some spotlight reports present surveys conducted (Cameroon, Pakistan). **Cameroon** cites a survey in which almost half of respondents stated that government does not ensure inclusive participatory decision-making.⁶⁵ **Pakistan's** spotlight report includes key findings of a survey of stakeholders that looked at the challenges of implementing the SDGs. Results indicate that only 13% of respondents approved of initiatives taken to build peace, justice and strong institutions.⁶⁶

As for the VNR reports, only a few countries include statistical annexes (Serbia, Mongolia, UK) providing information on all targets. **Serbia's** statistical annex shows that data is available for some SDG 16 targets, but that there are many gaps in the data available. Other reports include information on the targets, in some cases on a selected number of targets (Ghana, Guatemala, Mauritania, Mongolia, Pakistan). **Pakistan's** VNR also reports on local data collection efforts. Moreover, it mentions that data availability must be improved in order to monitor progress in the field of peace and justice. **Ghana's** VNR report provides details on target-specific measures for SDG 16.

63 Tier Classification for global SDG indicators. 20 November 2019, IAEG SDGs (2019).

64 'Partners for Review, Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis', GIZ, 2019, p. 33.

65 Country Report – Progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies, SDG 16+ in Cameroon, WAA Cameroon, 2019, p. 15.

66 Citizens' Voices on Voluntary National Review & Status of SDGs in Pakistan 2019', AwazCDS/Pakistan Development Alliance and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2019, p. 9 .

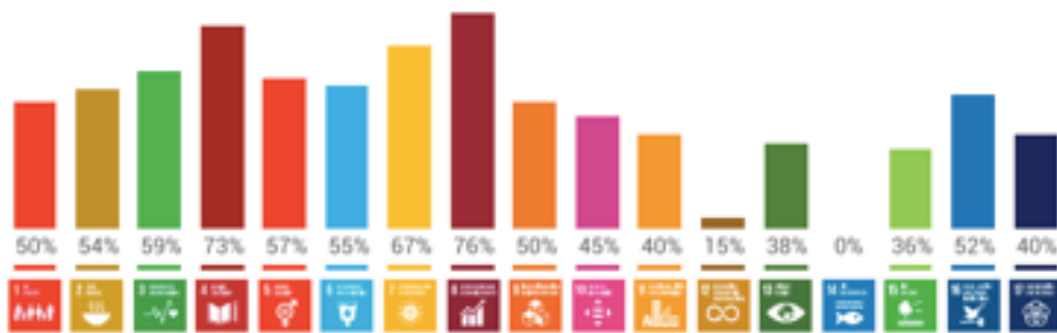
Generally, there is a difference between the way the spotlight reports and VNRs report on statistics and data. VNRs mostly report on the progress made on monitoring frameworks and provide information from official statistical sources, whereas some spotlight reports offer results of surveys or their own data specifically on SDG 16. **There are only a few cases of detail overlaps in VNRs and spotlight reports.** One such case is **Mauritania**, whose spotlight report and VNR both mention the establishment of a database of the prison population that is disaggregated by sex, age, and religion.

5.2 Data availability

One of the challenges related to the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda is the lack of data and gaps in data availability. Limited information is provided on this challenge, with specific reference to SDG 16, in both the spotlight and VNR reports. Some spotlight reports mention data availability on the SDGs in general (Cameroon, Mongolia, Serbia). **Cameroon's** spotlight report states that a review has been performed of the national and sub-national indicators adopted. Feedback on data availability for specific indicators only is provided in **Serbia's** spotlight report, which highlights the lack of data for target 16.1 at all levels.

More details on the availability of data are provided in the VNR reports (Cambodia, Guatemala, Mongolia, Pakistan, UK). Some reports provide specific details on indicators. Individual reports analyse each indicator thoroughly, also at the local level (Pakistan). **Mongolia's** VNR report includes the results of a 'data readiness assessment' of the SDG indicators for each goal. Data were classed as 'not applicable', 'readily available', 'available after additional estimation' or 'not available'.⁶⁷ Data gaps for each SDG were identified as a result of the data readiness assessment. For SDG 16, the report specifies 52% availability of data for the global indicators (Box 12).

Box 12: Data readiness assessment of SDG indicators, VNR Mongolia



⁶⁷ 'Mongolia Voluntary National Review Report', Government of Mongolia, 2019, p. 44.

5.3 Assessments and data quality

A comparison of the way statistics and data are assessed in the VNR and spotlight reports reveals that only a few spotlight reports make reference to the quality of indicators (Ghana, Mongolia, Serbia). **Serbia's** spotlight report states that the indicator framework is evaluated. **Ghana's** spotlight report provides details on data disaggregation. By contrast, VNR reports include more critical feedback on the overall statistics and data context of the SDGs, although they too provide limited details when it comes to SDG 16 specifically. Generally, the VNR reports point out a number of data issues (Cambodia, Ghana, Mauritania, Serbia), including data availability (Cambodia, Serbia, UK), data disaggregation (Ghana, Mauritania, UK), and the establishment of databases and reporting platforms (Ghana, Mauritania). **Ghana's** VNR report states that a national data quality assurance framework is being developed to ensure the integrity of official statistics. It also reports on an online data reporting platform that has been launched to enhance the accessibility of disaggregated data. **Cambodia's** VNR report highlights a number of data issues including challenges related to data availability and quality. It reports that a review of the SDG 16 indicators is envisaged.

5.4 Non-governmental data sources

Most spotlight reports include non-governmental data sources⁶⁸ (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Guatemala, Mongolia, Pakistan, UK). In **Mauritania's** spotlight report it is indicated that civil society is not in a position to provide its own analysis.

Non-governmental data sources figure to a lesser degree in the VNR Reports (Ghana, Pakistan, Serbia). **Ghana's** VNR report highlights an SDG data roadmap that has been developed with the support of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD). A multi-stakeholder advisory committee has been put in place, bringing together representatives from the ranks of government, civil society, academia, the media and development partners, in order to oversee the implementation of the road map. The committee has initiated a number of work streams, including a partnership with private telecommunication providers to leverage and observe data for SDG monitoring.⁶⁹

68 Other terms that are often used are unofficial data or citizen-driven data.

69 'Ghana: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Republic of Ghana, 2019, pp. 11–12.

Box 13: Citizens' engagement in data collection and decision-making, South Africa

In South Africa, the National Treasury and civil society actors have held so-called 'Data Quests' that aim to promote the use of data to advance social change. Civic actors, public officials, social workers, and budget and data analysts come together to explore analysis and advocacy needs. Developers, students, entrepreneurs and data experts are encouraged to use the data to generate solutions to social issues. Citizens have already produced proposals for more housing, gender equality initiatives and infrastructure.

Source: openpartnership.org

Non-governmental data sources, including those used in spotlight reports, could be used to complement official monitoring and reporting, while also critically evaluating these, in order to progress towards SDG 16 (Box 13).

Partnerships, discussions and initiatives across stakeholder groups, including government, civil society, the private sector and academia, are also needed to strengthen common approaches to tracking progress on the SDGs. Some good examples have emerged, such as the 'SDG 16 Data Initiative' (Box 14). Apart from tracking progress, they can help introduce good practices and explore the potential offered by new technologies in the data development context.

Box 14: The SDG 16 Data Initiative

The **SDG 16 Data Initiative** is a collective project to compile existing global data that can help track progress toward the achievement of SDG 16. The initiative is a consortium of 14 partner organisations that seeks to support the open and holistic tracking of progress made on SDG 16. It collects and curates SDG 16 data, communicates what the data shows about the global progress and catalyses action through open data. The Data Initiative includes a variety of respected data providers and highlights gaps and useful alternative data sources in SDG 16. It therefore aims to complement the official indicator framework for monitoring the SDGs.

Source: www.SDG16hub.org/data-initiative

5.5 Reflections

Data availability and the development of indicators that measure the full scope of SDG 16 are important, in order to ensure accountability of governments that have pledged to deliver on the goal and the SDGs in general.

Generally, work on statistics and data to monitor the SDGs is ongoing in most countries.⁷⁰ Spotlight and VNR reports largely agree on SDG-related statistics and on the challenges posed by data availability and existing data gaps. **While VNR reports lay out the overall state of play of the monitoring framework, many spotlight reports incorporate specific information on SDG 16. In some cases, surveys have provided feedback directly from citizens relating to aspects of SDG 16 that can be useful in VNR reporting.**

Although some examples and best practices are reported that address data-related challenges, efforts should be scaled up to increase both the quality and the availability of data. To address data availability issues, non-official data sources, including civil society sources, can be used to complement official statistics, triangulate reports and help provide a realistic reflection of society.

Civil society and citizen-generated data can be particularly useful in providing snapshots of progress at the local level and can inform efforts to meet commitments to leave no one behind. Although few examples are given of citizen-generated data, some good examples can be seen.

⁷⁰ 'Partners for Review, Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis', GIZ, 2019, p. 33.

6.0 Follow-up and next steps

Four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, reporting on the SDGs is evolving. Following up actions and recommendations can help strengthen reporting structures, thus accelerating the implementation of SDG 16 and the Agenda as a whole.

Spotlight and VNR reports typically include a number of recommendations and next steps. In some cases these address stakeholder groups engaged in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, including government and civil society, and are instrumental in the identification of next steps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in partnership at national and local level.

6.1 Next steps and recommendations

Most of the spotlight reports propose next steps and make recommendations (Cambodia, Cameroon, Ghana, Mauritania, Mongolia, Pakistan, Serbia, UK). The two spotlight reports from **Ghana**, in particular, make specific recommendations for both the government and CSOs. Recommendations for the government include developing inter-community activities such as sports or soccer to promote national unity and peace, establishing a Youth Parliament to enhance youth participation in decision-making, establishing the Peace Fund and stepping up advocacy for the private sector to support peace initiatives, effectively decentralising the SDGs including institutional work planning and awareness raising activities and interventions to facilitate the achievement of the SDG 16+ targets, and establishing a coordination agency on SDGs to that would be responsible for leaving no one behind. In addition to these recommendations, one of Ghana's spotlight reports also makes recommendations for CSOs that concern the CSO Platform⁷¹, data collection, capacity building, integrating SDGs into programmes, localisation and knowledge transfer.⁷² **Mauritania's** spotlight report makes a recommendation to establish a formal mechanism or consultation framework that brings together civil society, partners and government engaged in designing the monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the SDGs.⁷³

The VNR reports generally lay out next steps, but they mostly focus on the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda rather than specific aspects of SDG 16. Some recommendations that relate indirectly to SDG 16 are the need to establish a national multi-stakeholder platform for monitoring and review (Cambodia), a stakeholder engagement strategy (Ghana), and stepping up decentralisation efforts (Ghana). **Mauritania's** VNR outlines more concrete follow-up specifically on SDG 16, including reforms to improve access to justice and strengthen capacities, as well as increasing investment in programmes and activities to help achieve SDG 16.

71 See Box 9, Chapter 4.0.

72 Progress on the SDGs: Telling the Ghanaian Story through the Lens of Citizens – Civil Society Organisations' Shadow Report on the Voluntary National Review. Ghana Civil Society Organisations Platform on the Sustainable Development Goals, 2019. p. 62.

73 Revue Nationale Volontaire', République Islamique de Mauritanie, 2019, p. 5.

6.2 Follow-up

Recommendations and next steps identified in the reports are useful for advancing the national and local implementation of the 2030 Agenda. VNR reports generally mention CSO engagement, and some provide details of their contributions. **Mauritania's** VNR report, for instance, includes an annex on civil society's contribution to the VNR report. On SDG 16, CSOs state that no feedback can be provided.⁷⁴ **While some of the spotlight reports offer a wide range of feedback and recommendations on SDG implementation, there is no indication that spotlight reports were referenced in the VNR reports.**












Some spotlight reports include information on contributions to the VNR process. In some cases, the findings of the spotlight reports were shared with the respective government (Cameroon, Serbia). **Cameroon's** spotlight report states that beyond 'simply' providing an alternative civil society perspective of progress towards achieving the SDGs, key findings were shared with the government, contributing to the VNR and an associated validation workshop. It does not, however, report on any government response. One of **Serbia's** spotlight reports also points out that the report was presented during consultations, and subsequently revised. **Pakistan's** spotlight report mentions a government announcement that it would welcome shadow reports. The planning commission issued a letter to encourage participation in the shadow reporting process on the part of government officials, academia, the private sector, to give but a few examples.

Civil society organisations from **Pakistan** and the **United Kingdom** reviewed their government's VNR as a follow-up to the HLPF. In the **United Kingdom**, UKSSD published a Score Card for the VNR. It report assesses the VNR on the basis of a list of expectations and provides recommendations for moving forward. It evaluates the VNR in terms of 5 priorities; i) vision, leadership and commitment; ii) the process of delivering the VNR, iii) quality of the VNR, iv) improving for the future; and v) clear delivery mechanism and approaches.⁷⁵ The rating provides direction in the prioritised areas. (Box 15)





74 'Revue Nationale Volontaire', République Islamique de Mauritanie, 2019, p. 92.

75 'SDG Scorecard – The UK Voluntary National Review', UKSSD, 2019.

Box 15: SDG Scorecard: The UK Voluntary National Review

What we expected	Rating	Moving forward
1a A commitment to the appropriate governance structures for the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK		A Minister in the Cabinet with domestic mandate must lead the UK's efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals across all government departments
1b A commitment to a meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement mechanism		Clarity on the role that stakeholders will play in designing the stakeholder engagement mechanism and an agreement on its purpose are needed to ensure it is meaningful
1c A commitment to develop a national plan for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals with stakeholders participating in its design and development		The UK Government must commit to an ambitious and comprehensive plan for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals
2a The process for producing the VNR was open, transparent, accessible and inclusive, and a time-frame and plan for engagement was communicated publicly		We have an opportunity to explore, in open dialogue, why stakeholders feel that the Government's process did not engage them effectively. We need to learn lessons for future VNR and to inform decisions about the stakeholder engagement mechanism
2b Stakeholder contributions in the review of UK progress against the Goals were meaningful and their perspectives are reflected in the final report		The Government must ensure that future stakeholder engagement recognises the value of stakeholder perspectives and includes them in decision-making
3a The VNR reviews all the goals and targets in a systematic way to identify what has changed or is changing in the UK, both positively and negatively		A comprehensive and critical review of the UK's performance on the SDGs is needed, particularly to explore gaps in our understanding and on areas of policy incoherence
3b The VNR identifies whether Government policies and programmes are coherent and describes the positive or negative impacts and synergies of domestic policies in the UK and abroad		Policy coherence should be given a greater focus by the Government and steps taken to enhance cross-departmental working
4a The VNR identifies a process for the future engagement of Parliamentarians and all levels of government across the UK		Clarity is needed on how the Government will ensure that parliamentarians and all levels of governance will be engaged across the UK in the implementation of the SDGs
4b There is a commitment to a future VNR and other follow-up and review processes, including an open learning process of the 2019 VNR		The Government should commit to a future VNR at the earliest opportunity
5a There is a commitment to partnerships for the domestic delivery of the Goals, and specifically how the UK Government will enable these		The Government should outline how it will enable partnerships to develop to support the implementation of the Goals across the UK
5b There is a commitment to future resource mobilisation that reflects the spirit of Goal 17 and addresses implementation requirements		The Government must establish an approach to resource mobilisation in the spirit of SDG 17 to accelerate progress on the SDGs in the UK

Key to scorecard rating system

Rating	What it means
	Strong achievement across the board
	Satisfactory performance or outcome but some areas lacking
	Unsatisfactory in most areas with some satisfactory elements
	Poor performance or outcomes across the board

6.3 Reflections

Both spotlight and VNR reports include next steps and recommendations for follow-up. Many spotlight reports incorporate suggestions that can help support national implementation efforts. In some cases, findings of spotlight reporting review processes were shared with governments as a part of the VNR process. Feedback on CSO engagement is included in VNR reports, some of which also include recommendations made by civil society. Nevertheless, no reference is made in the VNR reports to spotlight reports per se. Post-HLPF feedback is provided by civil society in a few countries.

Strengthening and aligning reporting processes can help ensure steady progress on SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole. This applies to follow-up from one VNR and spotlight reporting period to the next, and between VNR and spotlight reporting processes. While routine reporting on SDG implementation is strongly recommended⁷⁶, this is not yet fully practiced by governments and civil societies. In some countries, however, good practices are emerging, including the review of the UK's VNR in the form of a Score Card that helps evaluate the VNR process. The results of an evaluation of this sort can help strengthen and systemise reporting on the SDGs.

Systemising recommendations reported in the VNR and the spotlight reports can enhance accountability regarding SDG implementation. At present though, the wide divergence in reporting structures and approaches limits the scope for systematic follow-up. For continuity between reporting and review processes, mechanisms and approaches are needed that provide for comparability and make it possible for VNR reports and spotlight reports to share knowledge. One country that has committed to annual reporting is Benin (Box 16).

Harmonising and formalising reporting practices can make it possible to share feedback and inputs, and thus include stakeholder perspectives on SDG monitoring and implementation needs. In view of the investment involved and the value of findings and recommendations laid out in VNR and spotlight reports, there is a need to explore ways of better utilising and sharing inputs and feedback. This could take the form of a platform or a database for spotlight reports, particularly on SDG 16.

Actors should consider putting in place systemised and integrated reporting processes that make it possible to evaluate both government and civil society perspectives on SDG implementation and monitoring, along with any reports from other stakeholder groups such as the private sector. **While VNR processes are already part of a formal reporting structure, mechanisms and (updated) guidelines for spotlight reporting could help add structure and enhance standardised reporting.** An official CSO Spotlight Reporting Platform could also support structured and standardised reporting.

⁷⁶ Partners for Review, 'Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis', GIZ, 2019.

Box 16: National Review in Benin

Benin has presented their VNR before the HLPF in 2017 and 2018. Independent of the global Forum, both government and civil society have committed to national review. Specifically, the Ministry of Planning has committed to produce annual reports of national implementation efforts. For 2019, the Directorate-General for the coordination and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda has prepared a detailed report reviewing the period from 2015-2019, considering the relevant policy environment, as well as achievements, challenges, and next steps. In the same vein, civil society has handed in their report as a follow-up to the 2018 shadow report that "takes stock of the reading that Beninese Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have of the achievements made by the Government".

Both reports do focus on the 49 targets which have been identified in a participatory multi-stakeholder prioritization exercise conducted in 2017, thus deviate from HLPF themes.

With regards to SDG 16, these are 16.2, 3, 5, 6, and 9, respectively. This very common frame of reference does provide grounds for targeted commentary on part of civil society: While assessments tend to overlap, civil society is enabled to formulate very focused feedback and constructive demands for improvement with regards to governance objectives that are shared in the first place. These demands may be raised in the so-called consultation forum, which allows diverse stakeholder groups to engage with government on issues pertaining to sustainable development. Both reports will serve as resource for further national-level reporting as well as for the country's VNR announced for 2020.

For Benin, regular reporting and continued dialogue have proven to be effective accountability mechanisms as the Spotlight Report highlights concrete examples of civil society demands raised in previous review that have been adopted by municipal government decrees.

7.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The 2030 Agenda aims to initiate a fundamental transformation towards achieving sustainable development by 2030. The transformation will require effective, transparent, accountable and participatory governance and peaceful societies as laid out in SDG 16. This goal has a fundamental role to play in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a whole, and has been recognised as both an outcome and an enabler of sustainable development. In 2019, there was a special focus on the transformative potential of SDG 16, due to the review of SDG 16 by HLPF.

While governments have a leading role to play, the achievement of SDG 16 depends on a ‘whole of society’ approach. To this end, the report evaluates VNR and spotlight reports submitted to the HLPF 2019 for a selected group of countries. In view of the 2030 Agenda’s core principles to enhance participatory, inclusive and multi-stakeholder approaches, the analysis looks at whether spotlight and VNR reports relate to one another, and if so how. It identifies the main commonalities and differences between the perspectives of governments and civil society.

7.1 Main findings

The assessment of the reporting on SDG 16 in spotlight and VNR reports indicates that a wide spectrum of approaches has been adopted in the areas analysed; i) key features - SDG 16 reporting, ii) mainstreaming of SDG 16, iii) stakeholder engagement, iv) statistics and data and v) follow-up and iv) next steps. A comparison of spotlight and VNR reports reveals little overlap in terms of specific content reported. Reporting structures also diverge when comparing content and practices. The difference in structures makes it difficult to compare reports.

» Key features – SDG 16 reporting

Reporting reflects the broad scope of Goal 16. Both VNR and spotlight reports are broad in scope, although reporting on strategic progress towards achieving the goal and its broader impact is limited. Some good practices are presented in spotlight reports, including an evaluation of progress made on the SDG 16 targets and broader considerations relating to SDG 16+. **A comparison of the content and topics reported in the government and civil society reports for each country indicates that in spite of some overlap, reports do differ significantly and do not generally address the same issues.** Some spotlight reports focus specifically on SDG 16, and a few actually address single targets. These reports offer rich, specialised content that can be relevant for VNR reporting and could provide direction for the further implementation of Goal 16. Civil society, in particular, points to the need to make progress on the SDGs. The need to step up efforts on SDG 16 concurs with the findings and recommendations of global VNR analyses and SDG/SDG 16 assessment reports.

» Mainstreaming SDG 16

Reporting on SDG 16 mainstreaming efforts is more elaborate in the spotlight reports than in the VNR reports⁷⁷, with the exception of reporting on specific mainstreaming efforts such as policies and legislative measures adopted and institutional structures put in place. **While these all contribute to achieving certain aspects of SDG 16, little information is provided on overall strategic approaches to achieving SDG 16, including interlinkages and/or trade-offs with other SDGs, as well as the principle of leaving no one behind.** While spotlight reports generally provide more detailed information on the broader connections of SDG 16 and SDG 16+, this assessment confirms the findings of many global SDG assessment reports, i.e. more analysis, investment, strategic approaches and action are needed to step up implementation of SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole, at both national and local level.

» Stakeholder engagement

In view of the 2030 Agenda's fundamental principles on inclusivity, participation and partnership, and its pledge to leave no one behind, governments and CSOs should aim to ensure the consistent involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. VNR reports recognise the importance of stakeholder engagement and of ensuring a 'whole of society' approach as being key to SDG implementation. **While good examples of stakeholder engagement initiatives can be found in both VNR and spotlight reports, critical assessments are also made and the need to strengthen stakeholder engagement is underlined.** One key factor that impacts adversely on stakeholder engagement is a lack of awareness of the SDGs and SDG 16. Governments and civil society should therefore continue to raise awareness and could, to this end, use tools that support both advocacy and meaningful stakeholder engagement.⁷⁸ Ongoing and meaningful stakeholder engagement is essential, to ensure all voices are taken into consideration. **As spotlight reports are frequently produced by a coalition of stakeholders, each with specific expertise or representing the interests of specific groups and citizens, they can provide a useful entry point for governments interested in stepping up stakeholder engagement and can provide for inclusive and participatory monitoring and implementation of the SDGs.**

» Statistics and data

Data availability and the development of indicators that measure the full scope of SDG 16 are important, in order to ensure accountability to deliver on the goal and the SDGs in general. Spotlight reports provide more in-depth information at the target level, and in a number of cases include survey results or provide examples of data collection efforts that can contribute to VNR processes and/or complement overall monitoring efforts. Spotlight and VNR reports largely agree on SDG-related statistics and on the challenges posed by existing data gaps as well as on the need for data to monitor progress on the SDGs. **To address data availability issues, non-official data sources, including civil society sources, can be used to triangulate reports and help provide a realistic reflection of society. Civil society and citizen-generated data can be particularly useful in providing snapshots of progress at the local level and can inform efforts to meet commitments to leave no one behind.** Partnerships, discussions and initiatives across stakeholder groups, including government, civil society, the private sector and academia, are also needed to strengthen common approaches to tracking progress on the SDGs. Apart from tracking progress, they can help introduce good practices and explore the potential offered by new technologies in the data development context.

» Follow-up and next steps

In terms of follow-up, useful recommendations are provided in many of the spotlight reports. In some countries, post-HLPF feedback is provided by civil society, which is a practice that can help systemise reporting. VNR reports generally contain information on CSO engagement and in some cases include recommendations made by civil society. **The VNR reports do not, however, make any reference to spotlight reports per se. Strengthening and aligning reporting processes can help ensure steady progress on SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole.** This applies to follow-up from one VNR and spotlight reporting period

⁷⁷ This is due in part to the fact that a few spotlight reports focussed specifically on SDG 16.

⁷⁸ See Box 8

to the next, and between VNR and spotlight reporting processes. For continuity between reporting and review processes, mechanisms and approaches are needed that provide for comparability and make it possible for VNR reports and spotlight reports to share knowledge.

Overall, findings of the analysis are consistent with the main conclusions of global, VNR and civil society assessment reports that have analysed progress made on the SDGs, SDG 16 and stakeholder engagement. While many countries are increasing efforts to meet the commitments they entered into with the 2030 Agenda in general and SDG 16 in particular, by introducing legislation to foster open and inclusive societies and uncover human rights violations, for instance, more efforts are needed globally to implement these mechanisms, and to strengthen stakeholder engagement, increase awareness of SDG 16 and SDG 16+, and address data gaps, to give but some examples.

7.2 Concluding remarks and recommendations

This comparative analysis provides a synthesis of insights on SDG 16-specific review, which is new in this form: the analysis covers a focus group of countries for which both VNR and spotlight reports were produced in 2019. This means that a number of reports have not been included, because no companion report was available. In order to improve the assessment in the future, the focus group should be expanded, making it possible to identify commonalities, broader trends and challenges on SDG 16 across countries and/or regions.

Some of the spotlight reports reviewed focused specifically on SDG 16 and SDG 16+, whereas the companion VNR report looked at all SDGs. While this affects comparability, these reports offer important insights that would inform this analysis in future.

Overall, if we wish to expand the scope of the comparative analysis of the monitoring and implementation of SDG 16, governments and civil society will have to redouble their efforts to strengthen and align reporting. The civil society reports will have to be published, and more investment will be needed in spotlight reporting in countries which currently have none.

In view of the 2030 Agenda's emphasis on inclusive and participatory, multi-stakeholder and partnership approaches, consideration of stakeholder perspectives can help advance SDG implementation at the national and local level. **Spotlight and VNR reporting can be mutually beneficial. CSO perspectives can inform VNR processes and vice versa. Given the knowledge generated by both reporting processes, ways of leveraging the findings of both ought to be considered.** Institutionalisation or structured approaches to SDG 16 reporting, both in terms of the VNRs and spotlight reports could add value to the review processes. This means that VNR and spotlight reports for each country should not be developed in a vacuum, but should be able to capitalise on knowledge generated from both processes.

Some good practices can be identified in both reporting processes, such as CSO follow-up to the HLPF, stakeholder-specific recommendations in spotlight reporting, and the inclusion of civil society feedback in VNR reports. Nevertheless, these are one-off examples. **Reporting practices should be harmonised and formalised to facilitate the sharing of feedback and inputs, thus aligning stakeholder perspectives on SDG monitoring and implementation needs.** In view of the investment involved and the value of these findings, there is a need to explore ways of better utilising and sharing inputs and feedback. This could take the form of a platform or a database for spotlight reports, particularly on SDG 16.

Actors should consider putting in place systemised reporting processes that make it possible to evaluate both government and civil society perspectives on SDG implementation and monitoring. While VNR processes are already part of a formal reporting structure, mechanisms and (updated) guidelines for spotlight reporting could help add structure and enhance standardised reporting. **An official CSO Spotlight Reporting Platform could also support structured and standardised reporting.**

Recommendations for governments

In order to ensure inclusive SDG implementation, governments should continue to seek opportunities to strengthen civil society participation. Our recommendations are as follows:

- ➔ Meaningful stakeholder engagement should ensure perspectives from across all sectors at all levels of society are considered in implementation, monitoring, review and follow-up processes.
- ➔ Including recommendations from civil society in VNR reporting and giving consideration to whether and how VNR and Spotlight reporting processes can complement each other provides an opportunity for holistic review processes.
- ➔ The establishment of fora or platforms to enable civil society representatives to regularly engage with government on issues relevant for sustainable development can help coordinate civil society engagement and facilitate constructive dialogue between government and society.
- ➔ A formalized national review architecture and regular national reporting may invite equally formalized and constructive recommendations for follow-up and may thus feed into more demand-driven policy making.
- ➔ Exploring the potential of CSOs as data providers may present a fruitful opportunity to addressing existing data gaps, which is an acknowledged and central challenge that governments have reported in VNRs. Where suitable, the inclusion of data from alternative sources may strengthen data, monitoring and accountability altogether.
- ➔ Allocating funding and capacity support for Spotlight Reporting may be conducive to the mobilization of non-governmental actors to support the achievement of the SDGs on national and local levels. Reporting processes may be used as an opportunity to outline explicit commitments to accelerator action towards any shortcomings identified.

Recommendations for CSOs

For continued engagement in the follow-up and review processes, our recommendations are as follows:

- ➔ All stakeholders should continue to call for full inclusion and meaningful participation in the implementation, follow-up and review processes of SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda, including the most vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- ➔ Where entry points to participate and engage in the VNR processes exist, civil society should work constructively to build trust and partnerships with national governments. In addition, engagement with local and sub-national authorities may ensure meaningful participation in the implementation of SDG 16 and the VNR processes.
- ➔ In order to increase leverage, civil society should strive for regular Spotlight Reports that are evidence-based, methodologically consistent and make reference, to the extent possible, specific and concrete government actions. In order to embrace a systemic approach, particular reference to policy planning and budgeting cycles may be valuable entry points.

- ➔ To enhance the comparability of spotlight reports, civil society should work to produce joint guidance on spotlight reporting along with templates that can be used to streamline reporting structures at the global level. The guidelines and reporting structures should take account of existing methodologies and approaches.
- ➔ Civil society should encourage analyses that are founded in and supported by robust and verifiable indicators and data sources, as well as non-official sources.
- ➔ Civil society actors may ensure consistent and comparative analysis of VNRs and spotlight reports in subsequent reporting cycles in order to identify possible entry points for stakeholder groups to participate in implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.⁷⁹
- ➔ Stakeholder groups may advocate for an official civil society spotlight reporting forum for SDG 16 and the 2030 Agenda more broadly, where the findings of these reports can be collected and analysed, and advocate for a mechanism to hold governments accountable where gaps and challenges are found. In the absence of such an official reporting platform, groups may create an independent, unofficial reporting forum to showcase and analyse these reports.
- ➔ Work together to collectively raise awareness on the importance of the 2030 Agenda and in particular the role of SDG 16 therein.

Recommendations for GIZ (and other implementing agencies)

GIZ, and other implementing agencies, are increasingly involved in supporting governments and stakeholders alike in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its review. To increase leverage, our recommendations are as follows:

- ➔ Programs which are supporting governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda or conducting review and follow-up processes should advise that Spotlight Reports be taken into account for their valuable insights into citizens' demands for sustainable development.
- ➔ Vice versa, programs which are supporting civil society and other stakeholders in conducting review and follow-up reports should advise that reporting be standardized, evidence-based and that recommendations provide constructive feedback to the issues featured in government reports. As reports offer analysis of challenges, opportunities and policy objectives to address sustainable development issues, they open up entry points to initiate meaningful multi-stakeholder participation in implementation processes at large. Programs should therefore encourage and strengthen the inclusion of non-governmental stakeholders whenever possible to foster open and constructive state-society dialogue.
- ➔ GIZ and other implementing agencies should therefore strengthen capacities and mechanisms to enable the design, implementation and evaluation of stakeholder engagement, ideally striving for multi-stakeholder processes.

⁷⁹ Amplified Commitments and Partnerships for Accelerated Action: Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+, 2019.

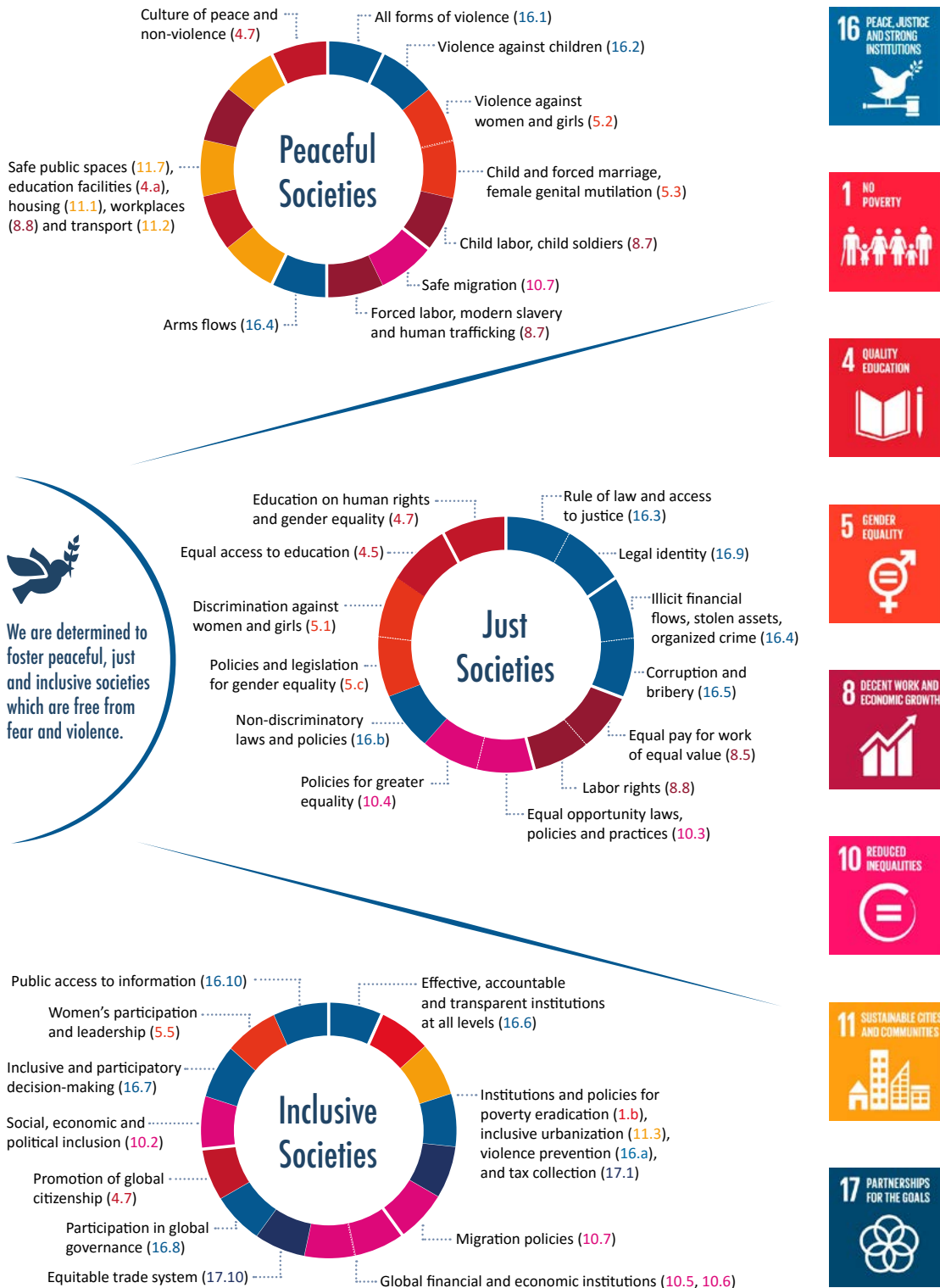
- In order to strengthen global learning, implementing agencies should engage to identify, collect and disseminate good practices of inclusive and participatory processes in general, and reporting exercises in particular. On the one hand, bilateral and global programs should identify best practices that may be shared in sectoral and thematic networks. On the other hand, specialists at Headquarters should function as multipliers of good practices and aim to integrate options for multi-stakeholder participation already during the conception phase of new programs.
- Partner institutions should be encouraged to present genuine experiences in regional or global fora to enable global learning. Lessons learned should focus on the mechanisms of stakeholder engagement but mostly on the transformation achieved through inclusive and participatory processes.
- Best practices and innovative approaches may be assembled and systematized in dedicated platforms and mainstreamed via (digital) learning fora in order to serve as informative resource even beyond the scope of SDG review.

Recommendations for UN agencies and global organizations

- A synthesis of SDG-specific findings from regular global assessments triangulated with Voluntary National Reviews and Spotlight Reports would provide a holistic picture about global SDG implementation, achievements made and persisting challenges – and may hence identify useful entry points for both global and/or targeted measures to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- UN agencies working to support governments in achieving the 2030 Agenda in general as well as to strengthen robust review in particular may advertise that civil society reports be taken into consideration for more inclusive and participatory national implementation, review and follow-up.
- Updating guidelines for Agenda 2030 review and reporting processes to specifically call for examples of meaningful stakeholder engagement and their added value to achieve sustainable development presents a veritable mainstreaming opportunity to collective approaches to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The focus on inclusive processes may regularly feature in VNR workshops in order to sensitize governments preparing to hand in VNRs at the HLPF.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement in general may be encouraged through dedicated awareness raising, peer exchange and global learning using platforms that are already existing, such as the HLPF, regional fora for sustainable development, expert group meetings for specific SDGs.
- Global organizations and networks may continue and expand the comparative analysis of VNRs and Spotlight Reports beyond a focus on SDG 16 in order to attain a more nuanced picture of global and/or national SDG implementation. In the same vein, comparative analyses may contribute to highlight what civil society and other stakeholders offer or may contribute to support SDG implementation.

Most of the recommendations address national-level policy-makers or relate to follow-up. Since the report also reflects key findings of official progress reports and national-level voluntary reporting efforts, however, it also offers insights that can inform global follow-up and review efforts. As observed, continued efforts to compare and assess VNR and Spotlight Reports could help integrate findings and foster inclusive reporting mechanisms in future. Ongoing investment is also needed to establish and step up civil society participation in monitoring, reporting, follow-up and implementation processes, also in the context of the ongoing HLPF reform process.

Annex 1



Annex 2: List of VNR and Spotlight Reports Analyzed

Country	Spotlight Reports	VNRs
Cambodia	Preliminary inputs from the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) on the Voluntary National Review (VNR) Cambodia on Goal 16 and Goal 17 on the Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs), 2019 Cooperation Committee for Cambodia	Cambodia's Voluntary National Review 2019 of the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda , Kingdom of Cambodia, 2019
Cameroon	Country Report, Progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies, SDG 16+ in Cameroon, 2019 WAA Cameroon, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)	Forum Politique Haut Niveau Objectifs de Développement Durable ODD – Examen National Voluntaire ODD Cameroun , Republique du Cameroun, 2019,
Ghana	Progress on the SDGs: Telling the Ghanaian Story through the lens of Citizens’ – Civil Society Organisations’ Shadow Report on the Voluntary National Review. Ghana Civil Society Organisations Platform on the Sustainable Development Goals, June 2019. Country Report: Progress Report, Towards Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, SDG 16+ in Ghana. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GGPAC) in partnerships with the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP) June 2019	Ghana: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development , Republic of Ghana, 2019
Mauretania	Revue Nationale Voluntaire sur les Objectifs de Développement Durable en Mauritanie, 2019, Reseau Mauretarien pour l'Action Sociale	'Revue Nationale Voluntaire' , Republique Islamique de Mauritanie, 2019
Mongolia	'Mongolian Civil Society Joint Report on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals' Mongolian National CSO Network on SDGs	'Mongolia Voluntary National Review Report 2019' , Government of Mongolia, 2019,
Pakistan	Citizens' Voice on Voluntary National Reviews & Status on SDGs in Pakistan, March 2019. AwasCDS/ Pakistan Development Alliance and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO)	Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development , Government of Pakistan, 2019.
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